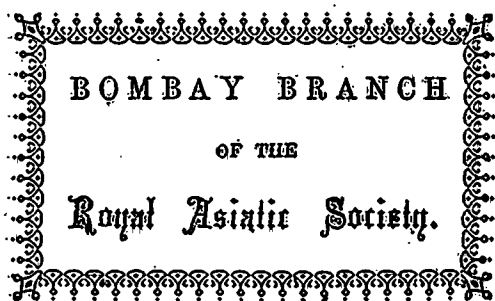


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AUTHOR OF "THE HUNCHBACK," ETC. ETC.

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TO
JAMES MUSPRATT, ESQ.
OF LIVERPOOL.

My Dear Friend,

A few honest words may convey a great deal.

This PLAY is justly and joyfully dedicated to you.

With affection and gratitude,

Yours,

JAMES SHERIDAN KNOWLES.

ADVERTISEMENT.

UPON the pleasant borders of the beautiful Loch Ard, and of its appropriate neighbours, the Dhu Lochan and Loch Kolm, the greater portion of this drama was composed. It was a delightful task ;—cheered, as it was, by the kind solicitude of my friend, Robert Dick, Esq., and of his family. Never shall I forget the time I passed under their hospitable roof—to the calm and content afforded me by which I attribute no small portion of the success—if I may say “success”—that attended my labours. Never shall I forget the anxious, warm-hearted host, who one day laughingly snatched my fishing-rod from my hand when I was going to play truant ; and, admonishing me that school hours were not over yet—for it was noon, and I had limited myself to the evening for indulgence in “the angle”—set me to my book and pencil ; on which occasion the fruit of my compelled industry was one of the best scenes in the play.

My friend, John Forster, Esq., of Lincoln’s-Inn Fields, must accept my thanks for service and kindness similar to what he has frequently rendered me before ; and for

suggesting several important improvements in the conduct of the plot—particularly with regard to the last act.

Planchè, my brother-dramatist, has laid me under obligations, which I have great pleasure in acknowledging. Had the drama been his own, he could not have shown more anxiety for its success. He has rendered me essential service where I stood very much in need of it, and I cordially thank him.

My friend, George Bartley, Esq., has added to his claims upon my gratitude, on the score of “The Hunchback” and “The Wife.”

I owe it to Mr. and Mrs. Mathews to acknowledge that, besides having granted me the highest terms I ever yet received for a play—they have displayed the most unstinted liberality in preparing my drama for representation.

CHARACTERS.

DUKE	<i>Mr. Cooper.</i>
PRINCE FREDERICK	<i>Mr. Selby.</i>
ULRICK	<i>Mr. Diddear.</i>
SIR RUPERT	<i>Mr. J. Vining.</i>
SIR OTTO	<i>Mr. Fitzjames.</i>
SIR CONRAD	<i>Mr. Wigan.</i>
HUON	<i>Mr. Anderson.</i>
NICHOLAS	<i>Mr. Ayliffe.</i>
STEPHEN	<i>Mr. W. H. Payne.</i>
FALCONER	<i>Mr. Collett.</i>
HERALD	<i>Mr. C. J. Smith.</i>
EMPRESS	<i>Mrs. Brougham.</i>
COUNTESS	<i>Miss E. Tree.</i>
CATHERINE	<i>Madame Vestris.</i>
CHRISTINA	<i>Miss Lee.</i>

LOVE.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

A Room in CATHERINE'S House.

Enter CHRISTINA and NICHOLAS.

CHRISTINA.

As thou lov'st thine ease, Nicholas, restrain curiosity. It is a steed that runs away with a man, without his knowing it, until it has thrown him. The danger is never found out until the mischief is done. Besides, it is a woman's palfrey, which it befits not a man to ride. What signifies it to thee, who comes into the house, whatsoever be the hour, so it is I that let him in?

NICHOLAS.

Doubtless, Mistress Christina; yet a knock at the door, at two o'clock in the morning—and the door opening at that hour, to let a man into the house—and that man a gay young spark—may make a body wonder, tho' he have no more than the ordinary stock of curiosity.

CHRISTINA.

Propriety, Nicholas, belongs to no one hour out of the twenty-four, more than to any other hour. It was fit that the young spark should come into the house, or I should not have let him in. And now mark what I say to you.

~~Play not the house-dog~~ any more. Do you mind? Let not your watchfulness interfere with your sleep, else, besides your sleep, it may peril your bed and board; but, if thou hearest a knock when thou liest on the weary side of thee, and wakest, draw thy night-cap over thine ears and turn on the other side; and so, to sleep again—yea, tho' it be four o'clock in the morning, good Nicholas!

NICHOLAS.

I shall mind.

CHRISTINA.

Do so, and thou shalt be wise. Duty, that becomes a busy-body, ever turns itself at last out of doors. Hast thou a good place, friend Nicholas?

NICHOLAS.

Not a better in all Germany!

CHRISTINA.

Then take my advice, and keep it.

NICHOLAS.

I will.

CHRISTINA.

Do! (NICHOLAS goes out.) My mistress will be discovered at last, well as she disguises herself, and plays the man. I wish she had not taken this fancy into her head; it may bring her into trouble. Ha! here she is; returned to her proper self. Who would believe that this was the spark I let into the house, at two o'clock in the morning!

Enter CATHERINE.

CATHERINE—(*speaking as she enters.*)

Christina!

CHRISTINA.

Madam!

CATHERINE.

O, here you are ! Was not Nicholas with you, just now ?

CHRISTINA.

Yes ; he is only this moment gone. I have just been giving him a lesson. He saw you when you came home last night.

CATHERINE.

Hush ! secrets should be dumb to very walls !
A chink may change a nation's destinies,
And where are walls without one—that have doors ?
Voice hath a giant's might, not a dwarf's bulk ;
It passeth where a tiny fly must stop ;
Conspiracy that does not lock it out
Fastens the door in vain. Let's talk in whispers,
And then, with mouth to ear. 'Tis strange, Christina,
So long I practise this deceit, and still
Pass for the thing I am not—ne'er suspected
The thing I am—'mongst those who know me best, too.
Yet would that all dissemblers meant as fair !
I play the cheat for very honesty,
To find a worthy heart out and reward it.
Far as the poles asunder are two things,
Self-interest and undesigning love ;
Yet no two things more like, to see them smile.
He is a conjuror, Christina, then,
Can tell you which is which ! Shall I be won,
Because I'm valued as a money-bag,
For that I bring to him who winneth me ?
No !—sooner matins in a cloister than
Marriage like that in open church ! 'Tis hard
To find men out ; they are such simple things !
Heaven help you ! they are mostly bird-catchers,

That hold aloof until you're in their nets,
And then they are down upon you and you're caged,
Nor more your wings your own. I have scarcely slept !

CHRISTINA.

You run great risk, methinks, for doubtful gain.
I wonder oft, when thus you play the man,
You should escape offence ; for men there are,
By nature brawlers, and of stalwart limb,
Who of their fellows take advantage when
Of slight and stunted frame ; and you do make
But, at the best, a green and osier man !

CATHERINE.

And there's a little airy, fairy thing,
Call'd spirit ; equalises statures, thews,
Ay, between dwarfs and giants, my Christina ;
Whereof, altho' a woman, I have a share
Ekes my dimensions out, beyond what, else,
Might suffer those o'erbear, that do o'ertower me.
Besides, I have full pockets ! That's enough !
They call me, " The young Stranger," and forbear
All question, since admonish'd 'twas my mood
To see the world *incognito* ; which I vouch'd
With a full purse, that made the table ring,
As I cast it down ; and startled some to see,
As Fortune's loaded horn had leaped among them.

CHRISTINA.

And think you none did e'er suspect your sex ?

CATHERINE.

Sure on 't ; for once suspected, 'twere found out.

CHRISTINA.

How do you hide the woman ?

CATHERINE.

With the man !

It was my girlhood's study. Bless thee, child,

Good shows do beggar bad realities !

When I have dress'd my brows, my upper lip

And chin *en cavalier*, I take an oath,

From such a time to such, I am a man.

And so I am ! One quarrell'd with me once—

'Twas when I first began this masquerade.

"Look you," quoth I, "I never quarrel but

"To fight, nor fight except to kill ; and so

"I make my mind up, sir, to die myself ;

"So spare your *carte* and *tierce*. Set points to hearts,

"And at the signal, in !" His fire I quench'd,

As water turneth iron cinder-black,

In a white heat duck'd sudden into it !

CHRISTINA.

But of your lovers ?

CATHERINE.

Tell me who they are ?

Alas, to have a rival in one's gown !

For 'tis the same thing—'tis your property.

The fabric of the sempstress to outdo

Heaven's fashioning—your body and your face ;

A piece of web, a needle and a thread,

Give value to them that themselves have not !

Yet so it is with dames of noble birth,

And how much more, then, with a wretched serf,

For, tho' ten times enfranchised, such I am.

But what my betters stoop to, day by day,

I spurn, Christina, spurn ! nor deign to wed,

Except a man that loves me for myself !

CHRISTINA.

And such a man, methinks, Sir Rupert seems.

CATHERINE.

Ah! he is poor!

CHRISTINA.

And what of that? He is proud,
And seems as jealous of his poverty
Almost as you are.

CATHERINE.

Yes! He makes no suit.
He ever follows me, yet stands aloof,
While others lay close siege.

CHRISTINA.

And of his rivals,
Prefer you any?

CATHERINE.

No. Have I not said,
When tax'd with paying court to me, the rest—
Yea one and all—instead of boasting me,
My person, or my mind, for their excuse,
Set forth my wealth; and ask if there 's a man,
Who would not wed a serf, with such a mine?

CHRISTINA.

Sir Rupert sins not thus.

CATHERINE.

Sir Rupert? No!
I bear him hard when I enact the man,
Which yet he suffers for the sake of Catherine,
My mad-cap cousin, as I call myself.
He is jealous of me; eyes me thus, as he'd

A spaniel that may bite as soon as fawn.
He never speaks of me—I mean myself—
Unless enforced, and then, to end the theme.
“Sir Rupert,” said I to him once, with more
Than wont civility—O, could you see
What a fire-imp I am when I’m a man—
“Sir Rupert,” said I to him once, “methinks
“Your friends are sorry judges of good fruit ;
“And for an apple like to get a crab.
“Deal frankly with me, kin you know are kin
“All the world over ; now a hug and kiss,
“And boxing faces next ! It follows not,
“You know, since I am coz to Catherine,
“Because she has the tooth-ache, I have one ?
“So, tell me, fair Sir Rupert,—for, indeed,
“Altho’ a spoil’d boy, as ’tis lawful for
“A mother’s pet to be, I wish you well,—
“What think you of my cousin Catherine ?”
And what was his reply ? Beginning, middle,
And end, as much as this,—“She is a woman.”
But, faith, the answer came in such a tone,
Each single word might pass for a whole book.

CHRISTINA.

I am sure Sir Rupert loves you : he has all
The signs of a lover.

CATHERINE.

What are they ?

CHRISTINA.

He sighs.

CATHERINE.

Sighs ! Listen to me ! (*drawing a deep sigh.*) There, girl !
what think you now

Of that, for a sigh ! and say you I'm in love ?
I will coin sighs for you, fast as the mint
Coins ducats. Shows are all uncertain things,
Unless the cheek indeed grows lank and pale—
Yet that may be with frequent lack of dinner.
So, 'tis betwixt the heart and appetite !
O for a sign would be infallible,
And him to show it, I would see it on !

CHRISTINA.

Sir Rupert ?

CATHERINE.

What is that to you ? Dear girl,
Whoe'er it be, I pray that I may love him !
The countess flies her hawk to-day. I'll make
Essay of mine.

CHRISTINA.

A most strange lady, she !
A form of flesh, and heart of ice.

CATHERINE.

Not so.
A heart, Christina, all possess'd of pride—
That hath no place for any passion else.
Suitors pursue her, still she yields to none,
But, hard requital ! pays their love with scorn ;
That, out of troops, remains at last but one,
The Prince of Milan.

CHRISTINA.

Will she ever love ?
Her heart is scarce the soil to root love's flower !

CATHERINE.

No telling how love thrives ! to what it comes !
Whence grows ! 'Tis e'en of as mysterious root,
As the pine that makes its lodging of the rock,
Yet there it lives, a huge tree, flourishing,
Where you would think a blade of grass would die !
What is love's poison, if it be not hate ?
Yet in that poison, oft is found love's food.
Frowns that are clouds to us, are sun to him !
He finds a music in a scornful tongue,
That melts him more than softest melody—
Passion perverting all things to its mood,
And, spite of nature, matching opposites !
But, come, we must attire us for the field.
The field—the field—Christina, were't to take
The field in love ?—a fair and honest fight !
I wonder, be there one true man on the earth ?
But if there be, I one true woman know
To match him—were he true as native gold.

CHRISTINA.

I think Sir Rupert one.

CATHERINE.

Sir Rupert ?—Umph !
If he were rich, and I as poor as he,
I'd tell you "yes," or "no," within the week.
Heaven keep me from the proof !—I should not like
To find Sir Rupert out. Come. Let me wed
The man that loves me, or else die a maid ! [*They go out.*]

SCENE II.

An Apartment in the Duke's Castle.

The COUNTESS—HUON reading to her.

COUNTESS.

Give o'er ! I hate the poet's argument !
'Tis falsehood—'tis offence. A noble maid !
Stoop to a peasant !—Ancestry, sire, dam,
Kindred and all, of perfect blood, despised
For love !

HUON.

The peasant, tho' of humble stock,
High nature did ennoble—

COUNTESS.

What was that ?
Mean you to justify it ? But, go on.

HUON.

Not to offend.

COUNTESS.

Offend !—No fear of that,
I hope, 'twixt thee and me ! I pray you, sir,
To recollect yourself, and be at ease,
And as I bid you, do. Go on.

HUON.

Descent,
You'll grant, is not alone nobility,

Will you not ? Never yet was line so long,
But it beginning had : and that was found
In rarity of nature, giving one
Advantage over many ; aptitude
For arms, for counsel, so superlative
As baffled all competitors, and made
The many glad to follow him as guide
Or safeguard ; and with title to endow him,
For his high honour or to gain some end
Supposed propitious to the general weal,
On those who should descend from him entail'd.
Not in descent alone, then, lies degree,
Which from descent to nature may be traced,
Its proper fount ! And that, which nature did,
You'll grant she may be like to do again ;
And in a very peasant, yea, a slave,
Enlodge the worth that roots the noble tree.
I trust I seem not bold, to argue so.

COUNTESS.

Sir, when to me it matters what you seem,
Make question on't. If you have more to say,
Proceed—yet mark you how the poet mocks
Himself your advocacy ; in the sequel
His hero is a hind in masquerade !
He proves to be a lord.

HUON.

The poet sinn'd
Against himself, in that ! He should have known
A better trick, who had at hand his own
Excelling nature to admonish him,
Than the low cunning of the common craft.
A hind, his hero, won the lady's love :
He had worth enough for that ! Her heart was his.

Wedlock joins nothing, if it joins not hearts.

Marriage was never meant for coats of arms.

Heraldry flourishes on metal, silk,

Or wood. Examine as you will the blood,

No painting on't is there!—as red, as warm

The peasant's as the noble's!

COUNTESS.

Dost thou know

Thou speak'st to me?

HUON.

'Tis therefore so I speak.

COUNTESS.

And know'st thy duty to me?

HUON.

Yes.

COUNTESS.

And see'st

My station, and thine own?

HUON.

I see my own.

COUNTESS.

Not mine?

HUON.

I cannot, for the fair

O'ertopping height before.

COUNTESS.

What height?

HUON.

Thyself!

That towerest 'bove thy station!—Pardon me

O, wouldst thou set thy rank before thyself?

Wouldst thou be honour'd for thyself, or that i

~~Rank that excels its wearer, doth degrade.~~

~~Riches impoverish, that divide respect.~~

~~O, to be cherish'd for oneself alone!~~

To owe the love that cleaves to us to nought
Which fortune's summer—winter—gives or takes!
To know that while we wear the heart and mind,
Feature and form, high Heaven endow'd us with,
Let the storm pelt us, or fair weather warm,
We shall be loved! Kings, from their thrones cast down,
Have bless'd their fate, that they were valued for
Themselves and not their stations, when some knee,
That hardly bow'd to them in plenitude,
Has kiss'd the dust before them, stripp'd of all.

COUNTESS (*confused*).

I nothing see that's relative in this,
That bears upon the argument.

HUON.

O, much,
Durst but my heart explain.

COUNTESS.

Hast thou a heart?
I thought thou wast a serf; and, as a serf.
Hadst thought and will, none other than thy lord's;
And so no heart—that is, no heart of thine own.
But since thou say'st thou hast a heart, 'tis well
Keep it a secret;—let me not suspect
What, were it e'en suspicion, were thy death.
Sir, did I name a banquet to thee now,
Thou lookedst so?

HUON.

To die, for thee, were such.

COUNTESS.

Sir ?

HUON.

For his master oft a serf has died,
 And thought it sweet,—and may not, then, a serf
 Say for his mistress, 'twere a feast to die ?

COUNTESS.

Thou art presumptuous—very—so no wonder
 If I misunderstood thee. Thou'dst do well
 To be thyself, and nothing more.

HUON.

Myself—

COUNTESS.

Why, art thou not a serf ! What right hast thou
 To set thy person off with such a bearing ?
 And move with such a gait ?—to give thy brow
 The set of noble's, and thy tongue his phrase ?
 Thy betters' clothes sit fairer upon thee
 Than on themselves, and they were made for them.
 I have no patience with thee—can't abide thee !
 There are no bounds to thy ambition, none !
 How durst thou e'er adventure to bestride
 The war-horse—sitting him, that people say
 Thou, not the knight, appear'st his proper load ?
 How durst thou touch the lance, the battle-axe,
 And wheel the flaming falchion round thy head,
 As thou wouldst blaze the sun of chivalry ?
 I know !—my father found thy aptitude,
 And humour'd it, to boast thee off ? He may chance
 To rue it ; and no wonder if he should ;
 If others' eyes see that they should not see
 Shown to them by his own.

HUON.

O, lady—

COUNTESS.

What?

HUON.

Heard I aright?

COUNTESS.

Arigh—what heard'st thou, then?

I would not think thee so presumptuous

As through thy pride to misinterpret me.

It were not for thy health,—yea, for thy life!

Beware, sir. It would set my quiet blood,

On haste for mischief to thee, rushing thro'

My veins, did I believe—! Thou art not mad;

Knowing thy vanity, I aggravate it.

Thou know'st 'twere shame, the lowest free-woman

That follows in my train should think of thee?

HUON.

I know it, lady.

COUNTESS.

That I meant to say,

No more. Don't read such books to me again.

I would you had not learn'd to read so well,

I had been spared your annotations.

For the future, no reply, when I remark.

Hear, but don't speak—unless you're told—and then

No more than you're told;—what makes the answer up,

No syllable beyond. [*Enter FALCONER, with hawk.*]

My falconer! So.

An hour I'll fly my hawk.

FALCONER.

A noble bird,

My lady, knows his bells, is proud of them.

COUNTESS.

They are no portion of his excellence;
It is his own ! 'Tis not by them he makes
His ample wheel ; mounts up, and up, and up
In spiry rings, piercing the firmament,
Till he o'ertops his prey ; then gives his stoop
More fleet and sure than ever arrow sped !
How nature fashion'd him for his bold trade !
Gave him his stars of eyes to range abroad,
His wings of glorious spread to mow the air,
And breast of might to use them ! I delight
To fly my hawk. The hawk's a glorious bird ;
Obedient—yet a daring, dauntless bird !
You may be useful, sir ; wait upon me.

[They go out.]

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

*The Country. On one side a Ruin, on the other a clump of
lofty trees.*

Enter PRINCE FREDERICK *and* ULRICK.

FREDERICK.

Now thou hast seen her, tell me what thou think'st.
Has she a heart?

ULRICK.

I think her flesh and blood.

FREDERICK.

Ay, most sweet flesh, and blood most rich!

ULRICK.

Then sure
She has a heart.

FREDERICK.

But where is it? None yet
Have found it out.

ULRICK.

You mean, a heart to love?

FREDERICK.

If not such heart, as well no heart at all!

ULRICK.

Men tell a mine a hundred fathoms deep,
By certain signs that near the surface lie:
Are flesh and blood more fallible than clay?

Take but her face—there's not a feature on't,
But vouches for the mood. Require you more?
Her limbs and body give you proof on proof.
If these convince you not, essay her voice;
'Tis of the stop befits the melting vein.
There's nought without but with her sex consists,
Pronouncing her its pattern, passing rich!
And can she lack the heart, the want of which
Would turn such affluence to poverty?
Prove nature but a niggard, after all,
Where she should seem to be most beautiful?
She has a heart, sir; and a heart to love!

FREDERICK.

How comes it, then, I plead a bootless suit,
And not a boy at wooing? Had I a chance
With a heart, were it not wholly occupied,
I never fail'd to find some footing in it
If not instate myself with ease;—with dames,
I own, less lofty, tho' on lighter terms
Than gift of hand for life. Why fail I here?

ULRICK.

Hast thou no rival?

FREDERICK.

None.

ULRICK.

Thou art sure?

FREDERICK.

I am.

Dishearten'd at a race that hath no goal,
Or one that seems to distance on approach,
My rivals leave the field to me alone.

ULRICK.

Thou may'st have rivals whom thou know'st not of.

FREDERICK.

No ! I have press'd her father oft thereon,
And learn'd the history, beginning, close
Of every siege of wooing ; ending each
In mortified retreat.

ULRICK.

You may have rivals
Unknown to him. Love joys in mystery ;
And when you think it countless miles away,
Is lurking close at hand.

FREDERICK.

You are still at fault.
She has no favour'd lover—cannot have.
The thing is out of chance, impossible !

ULRICK.

Call nought impossible, till thou hast proved
That passion hath essay'd it, and been foil'd ;
And set this down—nature is nature still,
And, thought to swerve, is at the bottom true.
Thy mistress is not stone, but flesh and blood,
Wherein doth lodge the juice of sympathy ;
Which, more refined in woman than in man,
In woman, sways it measurelessly stronger !
The essence of the sex is that wherein
We win a gift of their sweet forms and souls—
The tenderness for some especial one
Who then, 'midst millions, seems to stand alone.
That being absent, then there is no sex !
So where sex is, that also must be there—
As where the sun, also the light and heat.

So of two issues, set thy mind to one—
She has found the man, who stands 'mongst millions sole,
Or he is yet to find, and thou not he.

FREDERICK.

Thou nam'st two issues—I can find a third.

ULRICK.

Where is it ?

FREDERICK.

Here. As many streams will go
To make one river up, one passion oft
Predominant, all others will absorb.

ULRICK.

What passion, swoln in her, drinks up the rest ?

FREDERICK.

Pride.

ULRICK.

Of her beauty, or her rank, or what ?

FREDERICK.

Pride of herself ! intolerant of all
Equality—nor that its bounds alone—
Oppressive to the thing that is beneath her.
Say that she waves me off when I advance,
She spurns the serf that bows to her at distance.
Suitor and secretary fare alike.
I woo for scorn, he for no better serves—
Nay, rather worse comes off.

ULRICK.

Her secretary ?

FREDERICK.

The only one of all his wretched class
Her presence brooks ; for he is useful to her,

Reads with a music, as a lute did talk :
Writes, as a graver did the letters trace :
Translates dark languages—for learning which
She hath a strange conceit : is wise in rare
Philosophy : hath mastery besides
Of all sweet instruments that men essay—
The hautboy, viol, lute.

ULRICK.

A useful man
Your highness draws ! What kind of thing is he
To look upon ?

FREDERICK.

'Faith, proper, sir, in trunk,
Feature, and limb ; to envy, though a serf.
But, err I not, a most unhappy man,
And, for his service, weary of his life.

ULRICK.

~~O love, a wilful, wayward thing thou art !~~
'Twere strange ! 'twere very strange !

FREDERICK.

What ? what were strange ?
What said'st thou now, apostrophising love ?

ULRICK.

I said it was a wilful, wayward thing,
And so it is—fantastic and perverse !
Which makes its sport of persons and of seasons,
Takes its own way, no matter right or wrong.
It is the bee that finds the honey out,
Where least you'd dream 'twould seek the nectarous store.
And 'tis an arrant masquer—this same love—
That most outlandish, freakish faces wears

To hide its own ! Looks a proud Spaniard now ;
 Now a grave Turk ; hot Ethiopian next ;
 And then phlegmatic Englishman ; and then
 Gay Frenchman ; by and by, Italian, at
 All things a song ; and in another skip,
 Gruff Dutchman ;—still is love behind the masque !
 It is a hypocrite !—looks every way
 But that where lie its thoughts !—will openly
 Frown at the thing it smiles in secret on ;
 Shows most like hate, e'en when it most is love ;
 Would fain convince you it is very rock
 When it is water ! ice when it is fire !
 Is oft its own dupe, like a thorough cheat ;
 Persuades itself 'tis not the thing it is ;
 Holds up its head, purses its brows, and looks
 Askant, with scornful lip, hugging itself
 That it is high disdain—till suddenly
 It falls on its knees, making most piteous suit
 With hail of tears, and hurricane of sighs,
 Calling on heaven and earth for witnesses
 That it is love, true love, nothing but love !

FREDERICK.

You would not say the lady loves the serf ?

ULRICK.

I would say nothing in particular,
 Save upon proof. Let me together note
 The serf and lady, I will speak to the point,
 Or, baffled, hold my peace.

FREDERICK.

To that intent

I sent for thee,—for thou art keen of sight
 To pry into the inmost thoughts of men,

And find the proper ends towards which they aim,
Howe'er dissembled by assumed purpose.

ULRICK.

Your pardon, sir; your father bade me come
To warn you, in these times of turbulence,
He means to stand aloof, and take no part
Between the barons and the empress,—so
Your course you know to shape. What company
Is this?

FREDERICK.

The countess flies her hawk to-day,
And these are falconers in advance of her.
Those nearest us, observe. The lady first,
Is a rich serf, supposed love-daughter to
The former duke, who left her well endow'd.
Those with her are her suitors; but with none
She'll mate, believing that her wealth is prized
Beyond herself,—nor does she widely err,
Though some might think her beauty dower enough!
There is one who follows her indeed for love,
A man of heart; a gentleman, but poor,
Who his revenue spends upon his back;
I say he follows her: he woos her not,
Through pride, 'tis said, lest he be thought to hunt
The dross so much he needs;—whence I esteem
His chance the best. Mark! he is last of all.
Let us retire a space; there's company
Enough without us here. Some minutes yet
Before the countess will alight, and then
Remains the hill to climb. So bright a day,
Methinks, will scarce go by without a frown.

[*They retire.*]

Enter CATHERINE, SIR CONRAD, SIR OTTO, and SIR RUPERT.

CATHERINE.

Spy you my hawk? 'Twas here he struck his bird,
And vanish'd from my sight.

SIR OTTO.

Or I mistake,
Or from his stoop he rose again, and skimm'd
The brow of yonder copse.

SIR CONRAD.

I mark'd not if
He soar'd a second time.

CATHERINE.

Were I a man,
And waited on a lady that did hawk,
I'd keep her bird in sight! Sir Rupert, what
Say you? Where shall we go and seek my hawk,
Or lurks he hereabouts?

SIR RUPERT.

I saw him not
At all.

CATHERINE.

Not see my hawk at all? You'll do
For a falconer; so! Had I that boy,
My hair-brain'd cousin, whom you say you know,
And fair Sir Rupert hath such fancy for,
He plays the wasp so well—(a novel taste!
As I can vouch he is indeed no bee,
To pay you with his honey for his sting!)—
Had I that scape-grace with me, he would find
My hawk ere you began to look for it.—

How loth these friends are to part company !
Now will I scatter them (*aside*). Who finds my hawk
Deserves to kiss my hand, and he shall do it.

[SIR OTTO and SIR CONRAD run off.]

What ! like you not my wages, sir, you stand
Nor make a proffer of your services !

SIR RUPERT.

To kiss your hand would be most rich reward,
If love's sweet gift to him who sought your love ;
But, if love's gift, to one alone 'twere made
And not to any one !

CATHERINE.

Love's gift—what's that ?
Most thankless proffer made by empty hand.
Give me bright diamonds, I shall have bright eyes.
When fetch'd desert its value and was poor ?—
A hundred years ago ?—but it was left
A legacy, and then they found it out !
The world, they say, is an old churl,—'tis not.
Can you afford to feast, you shall be feasted ;
You shall not dine at home one day out of three ;
Nay, you may shut up house, for bed and board.

SIR RUPERT.

You are a young ascetic.

CATHERINE.

Am I so ?
Well, if I am 'tis in the family—
Witness my cousin whom you love so well.
A young ascetic say you ? Sir, I am
A young Diogenes in petticoats.
I have strings of axioms. Here are more for you.
They say that beauty needs not ornament ;

But sooth she fares the better having it,
Although she keeps it in her drawer.

SIR RUPERT.

Indeed?

CATHERINE.

Indeed, and very deed. For I have known
Bracelets and rings do miracles, where nature
Play'd niggard, and did nothing, or next to it;
Beat lotions in improving of the skin,
And mend a curve the surgeon had given up
As hopeless.

SIR RUPERT.

Nay, you speak in irony.

CATHERINE.

I speak in truth, speaking in irony;
For irony is but a laughing truth,
Told of a worthless thing. Will you have more?
You shall then. Have you never heard it said,
Or never dream'd you such a thing as this—
That fortune's children never yet lack'd wit,
Virtue, grace, beauty, tho' it tax'd the owners
To find them out? Once an exception chanced,
I know not in what year or part of the world,
But, while men stared at the anomaly,
One parasite, less comet-struck than the rest,
Turn'd up a heap of rubbish of all things
Good men and wise and men of taste eschew,
And found them underneath! Take this along, tho',
The owner never knew their value, for
He ne'er had need to go to market with them.
Why, what a man you are, Sir Rupert! Fie!
What! not a word to say? Let's change the theme then:

The argument shall be, that you're in love;
The which shall I affirm while you deny.
I say you are in love. Come, prove me wrong!

SIR RUPERT.

I never argue only for the sake
Of argument.

CATHERINE.

Come, come, you have a tongue!
You are in love—I'll prove it by fifty things.
And first and foremost, you deny it, sir;
A certain sign, with certain accidents—
As dulness, moodiness, moroseness, shyness.
I'd stake my credit on one single fact
Thou bearest out to admiration—
A lover is the dullest thing on earth.
Who but a lover—or his antipodes,
A wise man—ever found out that the use
Of his tongue was to hold it? Thou must be in love,
And for one sovereign reason, after which
I'll give no other—thou dost follow me!

SIR RUPERT.

Madam, altho' I may not use my tongue,
I do my eyes and ears.

CATHERINE.

But not your feet.
Will you not seek my hawk, and run a chance
To kiss my hand—or would it trouble you,
In case you found my hawk, to use your lips?
But I forget 'tis now your turn to speak,
And prove my oaks of arguments are reeds.
Have you no word?—or am not I worth one?
Or must I take your side, and beat myself?

I'll take your side, then. You are not in love,
Loving yourself too well!

SIR RUPERT.

You wrong me there.

CATHERINE.

Why, see what pains you take with your person! How
You dress!

SIR RUPERT.

'Tis not my vanity, but pride.
I am too poor to put mean habit on.
Whose garments wither shall meet faded smiles
Even from the worthy, so example sways,
So the plague poverty is loath'd, and shunn'd
The luckless wight who wears her fatal spot!
Want, but look full; else you may chance to starve,
Unless you'll stoop to beg. You force me, lady,
To make you my severe confessional.
From such prostration never can I rise
The thing I was before. Farewell—

CATHERINE (*looks out*).

Farewell!

What! go not to fetch my hawk, and there
He sits upon his quarry, new alit?
Or want you earnest of your wages? Well,
There, kiss my hand, and go and fetch my hawk,
And then be paid in full.

SIR RUPERT.

If I could speak—

CATHERINE.

My hawk were off again, ere you had done;
So I would lose his service—thou my thanks!

SIR RUPERT.

I will secure him straight.

[Goes out.]

CATHERINE.

I gave him pain,

'Tho' he has borne it with a noble heart !

I hope he will not make me weep in turn.

Symptoms I feel of something like a shower—

A slight one—but it must not fall. They are gone.

A noble heart ! a very noble heart !

Enter SIR RUPERT.

SIR RUPERT.

I have miss'd the hawk—he has taken wing again.

CATHERINE.

'Twas not your fault—you did the best you could.

I am not angry. There's my hand for you.

Mark'd you which course he took ? Then, come along,

We'll hunt for him together.

SIR RUPERT.

Stop—it lowers !

There's shelter here.

[SIR RUPERT and CATHERINE approach the Ruins—

Enter the COUNTESS and HUON, with Attendants

—PRINCE FREDERICK and ULRICK come forward a little, but so as not to be noticed.

COUNTESS (to SIR RUPERT).

Will there not be a storm ?

HUON.

I am sure there will.

COUNTESS.

I ask'd not you to speak ! When you should speak

It shall be shown—it shall be plain. Be sure
It is so, ere you give your counsel, sir.

[HUON retires to the group of trees, and leans against
one of them.]

Do you not think there's threatening of a storm?

SIR RUPERT.

Yes, lady. When the Heavens look troubled thus,
Earth can't be long at peace.

FREDERICK.

The only man
She brooketh speech from, with complacency.
Observe her now when I accost her. Madam,
Wilt please you take my escort to your coach,
At the hill foot I see attending on you?

COUNTESS (*haughtily*).

The rain is on, sir; I am better here.

SIR OTTO and SIR CONRAD enter in haste.

SIR OTTO.

A storm! a storm! Those pitch-black clouds that speed
In wild career to meet the sun, as though
In envy of his light to blot him out,
Come right against the wind—a token they
Bring thunder!

SIR CONRAD.

Yes; I saw a forked flash,
And while I held my breath and listen'd, heard
The distant clap. [*To SIR OTTO*] Avoid the trees; their tops
With boastful towering, dare the threat'ning bolt
To strike them!

[SIR OTTO and SIR CONRAD approach the ruins.]

ULRICK.

Do you note? She does not move—

What keeps her there ? Is that the scorned serf,
Leans drooping 'gainst the trunk of the tall tree,
Lends him pernicious shelter ?—Clear as day !

FREDERICK.

'Tis dark as night !

ULRICK.

What ?—O, the storm ! My lord,
I meant not that—your doubts are clearing up.
Look at the serf and lady.

CATHERINE (*to* SIR RUPERT).

Pray you speak
To the Countess—tell her she's in danger there
To stand so near the trees.

SIR RUPERT.

Madam—

CATHERINE.

Apace
The storm comes on ! 'Twill soon be overhead—
Ay ! there's the thunder now, and loud enough.
She heard not. Call to her again. She bears
That you accost her.

SIR RUPERT.

She is fond of you.

CATHERINE.

Yes ; but you mark'd her scorn of Huon, now !

SIR RUPERT.

Madam ! Madam ! Pray you
Come from beneath the trees. It lightens fast—
A bolt may strike you, madam !

COUNTESS.

I do hear you, sir.

ULRICK.

The peril of the serf transfixes her !
Her life, be sure, is only part of his !
A common act of charity it were
Command him thence ; but, conscious of the cause,
Stronger than charity, would prompt the act,
And fearing to betray it worse than death,
She perils her own life ! It is not right
To leave her there—go to her—take her thence !

FREDERICK.

Your pardon, lady, but you must not brave
The lightning. Come into the open space :
There's shelter, with less chance of penalty,
Beneath this time-worn ruin. (*Thunder and lightning.*)
Heavens, how near !

Almost together came the clap and flash !
'The trees are all on fire—the serf is struck !

[*HUON staggers from the tree—the COUNTESS rushes to him, clasping him.*]

COUNTESS.

No ! no !—O Heaven, he's dead ! why would he stand
Beneath the trees !—What, Huon !—speak to me !
Show me thou hear'st me ! Let me see some signs
Of life ! Why, Huon ! Huon !—He is dead !

ULRICK.

Lady, he is not dead, but only stunn'd.
'Twas but a shock, altho' a heavy one.
His colour comes—you see his eye-lids ope'—
So please you, leave the charge of him to me.

COUNTESS.

I thank you, sir—am sorry such a load
Should burden you. Would some of my attendants

Were here, to ease you on't. How dread a thing
Is death, when sight on't makes one not oneself !
Grows it not lighter, sirs ?—Ay, there's the sky.
Almost as soon as come the storm is gone.
Pray leave him to himself. 'Twas but a shock ;
It shames me, such a load should burthen you.

ULRICK.

As yet, he cannot stand.

COUNTESS.

Indeed ?—O !—ay !—

It was a heavy shock. I have a horror,
And always had, of lightning. Do you know
It takes away my wits ? Did you not feel
As I did, Catherine, when they thought the lightning
Had kill'd the serf ? A dreadful thing is death !
And most of all, by lightning ! where is my hawk ?
O, they had charge to bring him after me,
And here they come. Let's meet them, Catherine.

[Going, stops and turns to look at HUON.]

ULRICK.

He still grows better, madam.

COUNTESS.

Who, sir ?—O,
The serf ?—Why, Catherine, where's your hawk ?

CATHERINE.

I have lost him.

COUNTESS.

I hope the lightning has not struck him. Come :
We'll have fair weather yet.

Enter two or three Attendants.

Go, some of you,
Relieve his lordship from his load.

*[Two of the Attendants take HUON, and lead him off,
the COUNTESS watching.]*

ULRICK.

You see
He is unhurt.

COUNTESS.

My lord ?—I see.—You take
Great interest in my serf. The sun is out ;
My hawk against the field ! Come, Catherine.

[All go out, except FREDERICK and ULRICK.]

• ULRICK.

You see, my lord ; and seeing, comprehend.
Straight will I to the Duke, and tell him this.
A kingdom to a hawk, she loves the serf !

[They go out, severally.]

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

A Chamber in the Castle.

Enter DUKE and ULRICK.

DUKE.

SHE loves the serf? Impossible!

ULRICK.

My lord,
'Tis true.

DUKE.

It cannot be! Her pride alone
Forbids belief. More loftily, my lord,
The stateliest of all her ancestors
Ne'er wore his rank, than she.

ULRICK.

She loves the serf.

DUKE.

Give me some reason stronger than averment.

ULRICK.

Such I have given already. What, my liege,
But love, such contradiction could beget?
When did cold scorn look, speak, and act like love?
Woman or man is known by fits and starts,
More than by habits, which may be put on;
For those so take the judgment off its guard,
That inmost thoughts are shown. With care for him,
She all forgot herself. Had doubt remain'd,

It had vanish'd when assurance of his safety
Restored collectedness, which brought with it
Slight of the thing that, but a moment gone,
Seem'd essence of her being.

DUKE.

You are right.
'Tis the solution of the mystery,
That with the progress of the season, comes not
The fruit it promised ; and no sign of blight,
Canker, or mildew, but the blossom rich
As ever knit into the perfect fruit
Fulfilled its pride in the crowning. Yes ; her girlhood—
Now longer past than some would choose to own—
Put forth a bloom like many another's prime,
That often then I fancied love would come.
When her prime came nor love along with it,
With many a suitor have I sigh'd to think
Her breast was ne'er intended lodge for him
It seem'd most fitted for, and little dream'd
The guest we miss'd, already was within.

ULRICK.

And never fear'd the serf ?

DUKE.

No.

ULRICK.

Was't not strange ?

DUKE.

Not to consider him as I did ; creature
Made for her pride to vent its mood upon—
Her pride insufferable—which alone
Seem'd fruit of her capricious womanhood.

ULRICK.

That foil'd you.

DUKE.

When the serf was but a boy—
His mistress then an infant—taken with
His forward parts, I put them to the test
Of scholarship, which they robustly stood,
A hundred-fold repaying cultivation.
Nor stopp'd I there ; but, as he grew to manhood,
Gave training to him in those exercises,
Wherein our youths of gentle blood indulge—
Preludes to feats in peace, and deeds in war—
That I might boast a serf supreme in arms ;
As many a knight unwillingly has own'd,
Accepting challenge to make proof of him.

ULRICK.

What didst propose him for ?

DUKE.

Instructor first,
Then page and secretary to my child.

ULRICK.

Instructor, didst thou say ? Companion of
Her hours of privacy ? Her age was then—

DUKE.

Twelve, if I err not.—Yes ; Twelve times I then
Had bless'd the day that gave my daughter birth.

ULRICK.

Her spring was mellowing into summer then,
Young summer ! at whose genial glow, the heart
Finds wishes and affections shooting up,
Known but by name before, and thrills and swells

With rapture of the strange and plenteous verdure.
She prosper'd with his aid ?

DUKE.

O, wond'rously.

ULRICK.

And loved at first her tutor ?

DUKE.

Much ; but soon
A change, which grew with her, the nearer she
Approach'd to womanhood. 'Twas distance first ;
Then sullenness ; then scorn, which she gave sway to
Incontinent, and chiefly of those feats
Of high address wherein he match'd the noble,
And which it seem'd her pastime he should practise
For recompense of aggravated spite.

ULRICK.

Which he endured for love !

DUKE.

He dies ! That ends it.

ULRICK.

Yes ; confirming it
Perhaps. Beware, sir, of a tragedy
So deep ! Her scorn may melt at it, and help
Her tears to keep them flowing on, until
She weeps her life away. You must not play
With a first passion, once it has taken root.
For it strikes deep—to the foundations even
Of the heart—entwining with the fibres, there,
Of life itself, that, pluck the other up,
These haply come along.

DUKE.

He shall to exile,
Thousands of miles away, 'midst snows and deserts !

ULRICK.

So may you tempt her, sir, with pity for him,
To turn a pilgrim—take up staff and scrip,
And follow him. She scorns him for the scorn
Which others' eyes behold his station with.
Removed from their regards, her rank unknown,
For her rich charms were his embraces, lodge
She'd change your palace for.

DUKE.

Impossible !

ULRICK.

O, never did achievement rival Love's,
For daring enterprise and execution.
It will do miracles ; attempt such things
As make ambition, fiery as it is,
Dull plodding tameness, in comparison.
Talk of the miser's passion for his store—
'Tis milk and water to the lover's, which
Defies the mines of earth and caves of ocean
To match its treasure ! Talk of height, breadth, depth—
There is no measure for the lover's passion,
No bounds to what 'twill do !

DUKE.

Advise me, then,
What's best.

ULRICK.

Induce the serf to marry. That
Were cure, in the end, for your fair daughter's passion ;
Whose wound were his aggression, so resentment

Would blunt the edge of disappointed love.
For, doubt not, though she ne'er espouses him,
She trusts so far to keep him to herself,
As that he ne'er shall pillow with another.

DUKE.

'Tis done. I have a bride for him, at once.
One of his class, enfranchised by the will
Of my cousin, who preceded me; indeed,
Supposed love-daughter to him, and endowed
With wealth of his, that makes her coveted,
As fitting mate, by men of gentle blood.
Her humour 'tis to keep her freedom still;
But to my wish, as soon as known, she'll bend,
Aware I may encoil her in the mesh
My cousin's love or bounty freed her from.
But say I wed the serf to Catherine,
What profit then? My child may still persist
To keep her virgin state.

ULRICK.

I should commit
To Heaven the election of her husband;—let
The tournament determine who shall wed her.

DUKE.

Thereto I have made provision in my will;
And further, sir, as I am due to death
Now many a year, and momentarily
Expect his summons, pray you keep by me
The little space I have to tarry yet—
For on your wisdom I have all reliance.
Your prince, I know, will not gainsay me here.
And when it pleaseth Heaven to leave my body
Without the breath it has inherited

So long, no minute lose, but take occasion
Of the fresh flow of sorrow in my child—
When her young heart is soften'd, and will mould
Itself into his will, who is no more—
To break to her, on this particular head,
My dying testament.

ULRICK.

I shall remember.

DUKE.

So please you I shall join you with the empress,
Liege lady and good cousin to my child,
Executor.

ULRICK.

I will discharge the trust.

DUKE.

My lord, send Huon to me. Question not,
Advise me not. He marries, or he dies.

[ULRICK *goes out*.]

Life spent to waste ! My pride become my shame !
For this I rear'd her—rear'd to tow'ring thoughts.
A gasp of being only left, and that
To sigh that being has been spent in vain
For her, last shoot of an illustrious tree !
I loved my serf, was vain of him, and made
My vanity to smile through his deserts ;
And now, their light is cloud to all my hopes.
Through mine own pride my high aspirations fall.
They shall not fall ! Good bye to ruth ! He dares
To love my child—to covet her I grudged
Surrender of to those could boast estate
Equal to mine ! Born at my very foot,
How durst he lift his eyes so giddy high !
He comes. I see ! The passion, never yet

I dream'd of, stares upon me, in his look,
His air, his gait. 'Tis dead—or he must die !

Enter HUON.

Huon !

HUON.

My lord ?

DUKE.

I have been thinking of thee.

HUON.

My lord is ever good.

DUKE.

I have a notion

'Twould profit thee to marry.

HUON.

Marry !

DUKE.

Yes.

HUON.

I first must love.

DUKE.

And hast thou never loved ?

Why art thou silent ? Wherefore holds thy tongue

Its peace, and not thy cheek ?

HUON.

My cheek !

DUKE.

It talks !

A flush pass'd o'er it as I spoke to thee :

And now it talks again—and on the ground

Thou cast'st thine eye. "Thou first must love"—My
friend,

Thou art in love already. Art thou not ?
Art thou not, Huon ?—Never mind, but keep
Thy secret.—I have fix'd that thou shalt marry.

HUON.

My lord—

DUKE (*interrupting him*).

I know it will advantage thee,
And I have look'd around my court to find
A partner for thee, and have lit on one.

HUON (*more earnestly*).

My lord—

DUKE (*interrupting him again*).

She has beauty, Huon, she has wealth ;
And what doth qualify her better still—
As of unequal matches discords grow—
She's of thy own class, Huon, she is a serf.

HUON (*impetuously*).

My lord—

DUKE (*interrupting, indignantly*).

My serf !—How now ?—Wouldst thou rebel ?

HUON.

Rebel, my lord.

DUKE.

I trust I was deceived !
I did not see defiance in thine eye,
And hear it on thy tongue ? Thou wouldst not dare
So much as harbour wish to thwart thy lord,
Much less intent ? Thou know'st him ! know'st thyself !
Thou may'st have scruples—that thou canst not help ;
But thou canst help indulging them in the face
Of thy lord's will. And so, as 'tis my will

Thou marry straight, and I have found thy match,
I'll draw a paper up, where thou shalt make
The proffer of thy hand to Catherine,
And thou shalt sign it, Huon.

[Writes.]

HUON.

'That I were dead !

O, what is death, compared to slavery !
Brutes may bear bondage—they were made for it,
When Heaven set man above them ; but no mark,
Definite and indelible, it put
Upon one man to mark him from another,
That he should live his slave. O heavy curse !
To have thought, reason, judgment, feelings, tastes,
Passions, and conscience, like another man,
And not have equal liberty to use them,
But call his mood their master ! Why was I born
With passion to be free—with faculties
To use enlargement—with desires that cleave
To high achievements—and with sympathies
Attracting me to objects fair and noble,—
And yet with power over myself as little
As any beast of burden ? Why should I live ?
There are of brutes themselves that will not tame,
So high in them is nature ;—whom the spur
And lash, instead of curbing, only chafe
Into prouder mettle ;—that will let you kill them,
Ere they will suffer you to master them.
I am a man, and live !

DUKE.

Here, Huon, sign,
And Catherine is your wife,

HUON.

I will not sign.

DUKE.

How now, my serf!

HUON.

My lord, I am a man ;
And, as a man, owe duty higher far
Than that I owe to thee, which Heaven expects
That I discharge. Didst thou command me murder,
Steal, commit perjury, or even lie,—
Should I do it, though thy serf? No! To espouse her,
Not loving her, were murder of her peace.
I will not sign for that! With like default,
To compass mastery of her effects,
Were robbery. I will not sign for that!
To swear what I must swear to make her mine,
Were perjury at the very altar. Therefore
I will not sign! To put forth plea of love,
Which not a touch of love bears witness to,
Were uttering a lie. And so, my lord,
I will not sign at all!—O, good my liege,
My lord, my master, ask me not to sign!
My sweat, my blood, use without sparing; but
Leave me my heart—a miserable one
Although it be! Coerce me not in that,
To make me do the thing my heart abhors!
I beg no more!

[*The DUKE draws his sword, and resolutely approaches*
HUON. *At the same minute the COUNTESS*
enters, unperceived, and stops short.

DUKE.

Huon, I love thee,
And would not do thee harm, unless compell'd.
Thou shouldst not play with me, and shalt not. Take,
Therefore, thy choice—death, or the paper.

HUON.

Death !

DUKE.

Thou makest thy mind up quickly, in a strait.

HUON.

I do not wish to live.

*[Opens his vest, takes the point of the DUKE's sword,
and places it opposite his heart.]*

Set here thy point ;

'Tis right against my heart ! Press firm and straight ;

The more, the kinder ! *[A pause]*

DUKE.

As thou wishest death,

I will not kill thee for thy disobedience.

An hour I grant for calm reflection. Use it.

If, on the lapse of that brief space, I find

The page without addition, thou may'st learn

That even slavery hath its degrees,

Which make it sometimes sweet. Our felons throng

The galleys ; but 'tis hard, or we shall find

A bench and oar for thee. *[He goes out.]*

HUON.

My lord, come back !

My lord ! What now my mind, be sure 'twill be

At the end of the hour ! of the day ! of my life !—My
lord !

He does not hear, or will not. Most sweet cause

Of most insufferable misery,

Wouldst thou not weep at this ? Couldst thou look on,

And keep pride sitting in thy woman's eye—

The proper throne of pity—which for me,

The melting queen has yet refused to fill,

But to a stern usurper all abandon'd !
Wouldst thou not weep ? Or would my name alone —
My sole condition set 'gainst all myself ;
The vivid thoughts, the feelings sensitive,
The quick affections, passions of a man,
Despite his misery of birthright ; flesh,
Warm, warm ; of as high vitality as tho'
His lot had been an heirdom to a throne—
Would that, prevailing 'gainst such odds as these,
Prevent thee ? Yes ! Thou wouldst not weep for me.
O, knew I what would make thee ! Would my corpse ?
Then to thy father ! own my passion for thee,
'Tell him his serf aspires to love his daughter,
Boasts of it, tho' he sends him to the galleys,
Will glory in it, chain'd beside the felon,
Ay, with the tasker's whip whirling above him,
Reiterate it, when he threatens me,
And when again he threatens, justify it,
On the broad rights of common human nature,
Till with his own hand he transfixes me !

[*Following the DUKE.*

COUNTESS (*interposing*).

Stop, Huon !—What's the matter ?

HUON.

Huon—Huon !

Didst thou say Huon—and with gentleness ?

Madam—my mistress—I am your slave !—I am nothing
But the poor serf !

COUNTESS.

See if that door is free
From list'ners.

HUON (*going to the door*).

There is no one here.

COUNTESS.

Come in,
And shut it again.

HUON.

'Tis shut.

COUNTESS.

Now, what's the matter
With my father and you ?

HUON.

He bade me sign that paper,
And I refused.

COUNTESS.

What is it ? Let me see it.

HUON (*hands the paper, and watches the COUNTESS while she reads*).

How her eye fastens on the writing—seems
To grasp it, as her hand the paper ! What !
Did she start ? She did ! O, wherefore ?—What is this ?
Her sweet face, that just now was all a calm,
Shows signs of brooding tempest ! Yes, 'tis on—
Lowers on her brow, and flashes on her cheek,
Like cloud and lightning. How her bosom heaves !
What makes it heave ? She has let the paper drop,
Yet there she stands as tho' she held it yet !
And where but now all was astir—now, all
Again is stillness ! Dare I speak to her ?
She is not like to faint—no—no—she breathes !
Her haughty spirit wakes in her again,
Towering, alas ! as ne'er it did before.

COUNTESS (*after a violent struggle, giving way*).

Huon, I die !

HUON.

Heavens !—Mercy !

COUNTESS (*bursting into tears*).

It is over.

Do not speak to me ! Let my tears flow on !

HUON.

Flow they for me ?

COUNTESS.

I told you not to speak.

HUON.

Sweet Heaven ! your voice is tears ;
Your looks are tears ; your air, your motions, all
Are tears ! floods ! floods ! to those that course your cheeks,
And fall more bright than diamonds on the hands
Which now I clasp to thee in supplication,
That thou wilt deign this once vouchsafe me audience,
To give my fatal passion vent before thee—
For years pent up within my wretched breast—
And then I'm mute for ever !

COUNTESS.

Huon, peace—

I know thou lov'st me.

HUON.

Thou know'st it, dost thou ?
And say'st it !—and mildly say'st it !
Not with a tone of scorn, not with a threat,
Nor accent yet of cold indifference
For the poor serf, who, body, soul, and all,
Not being worth a tithe of thee, yet dares
To love thee !—dares to wish for thee !—yes, wish,
Altho' he knows thee out of reach of him,
As the sun !—as the stars—a million, million times

Beyond the sun ! The poor despised serf,
 Despised of himself—of thee—of every one—
 Thou see'st he loves thee, and thou deign'st to say it !
 Say it with pity—with most tender pity !
 Behold'st him kneeling at thy feet, and know'st
 The passion throws him there, and suffer'st him
 To stay there !—Let him die there ! Let him die
 At thy feet ! [Falls at her feet.

COUNTESS.

Rise, Huon !—Huon !—Hear'st thou me ?
 And dost thou not obey me ? Wilt thou not ?
 Listen to me !—I do entreat thee, Huon,
 As thou dost love me, rise !

HUON (*rising to his knee*).

Again ! “ As thou dost love me, Huon ! ” And thy voice did
 sound
 As 'twere the voice of one that loved again !
 Thou start'st at that ! and terror all at once
 Looks from the eyes, whence something look'd before
 I 'd give the vision of my own to see there
 But for one other moment, so it set
 My soul ablaze with hope !—Can I believe it,
 My arm encircles thee !

COUNTESS (*with dignity*).

Remove it.

HUON.

Heaven !
 Thou changest ?—Yes !—Thou art returning fast
 To what thou wast before.

COUNTESS.

No, Huon—but
 Obey me—kneel no longer at my feet,

Staking thy love, and leaving all undone
As thou hadst sworn by nothing. Thou art bound
To marry Catherine, which doing not,
Thou dost not love me,—thou art not a man.

HUON.

I am indifferent to what I do.
All things of earth are now the same to me ;
Good, bad, love, hate, wrong, kindness, life or death.
What hour you please, I'll marry Catherine. [*Going.*

COUNTESS.

Now ! [*Stopping him.*
This very moment ! She will meet thee in
The chapel, whither thou must straight repair.
Thou wilt ?

HUON.

I will.

COUNTESS.

The chaplain thou wilt find
Expecting thee—and, if he be not come
Already, still he will be sure to come.
Thou wilt not juggle with me ?

HUON.

No.

COUNTESS.

Thou darest not—
I mean, thou darest not but respect thine oath.

HUON.

I'll keep it, madam.—Then, farewell for ever ! [*Aside.*
[*Goes out.*

COUNTESS.

'Tis done ! [*Sinks into a chair.*

But rise. It pleaseth me thou dost my will.
Huon, wilt do my will?

HUON.

Wilt do thy will?
It is the nature of my blood as much
As its colour—current! In thy every mood,
I will obey thee, lady.

COUNTESS.

Promise me
Thou'lt do the thing I bid thee.

HUON.

What is it?

COUNTESS.

Promise me first, and then I'll name it to thee.
Huon, wilt do the thing I wish?

HUON.

I will.

COUNTESS.

But swear thou'lt do it.

HUON.

Yes. What shall I swear by?

COUNTESS.

Thy love for me.

HUON.

Then, by my love for thee,
I'll do the thing thou bidd'st me.

COUNTESS.

Sign the paper!—
'Thou art about to speak—but don't—don't, Huon,
As thou wouldst not offend me; as 'twould grieve me—
I won't say, anger me—thou shouldst offend me.

Listen! I'll bear that thou shouldst love me, if
Thou signest—else command thee ever from me.
Wilt thou not? Speak not—give me acts, not words.
Or sign it, or begone!

HUON.

I'll keep my word,
And so do both. [Takes paper to table, and peruses it.

Enter Attendant.

COUNTESS (*to Attendant*).

Is Catherine in the castle?
If not, go to her house, and bring her hither.

ATTENDANT.

She is in the castle. Now she enter'd it.

COUNTESS.

Conduct her to my chamber. Stay. My chaplain—
Tell him, and do it straight, to wait me in
The chapel. Tarry. See that the chapel else
Is clear—make sure of it. That ascertain'd,
Take post at the door, and mind that none do enter,
Except the serf and the two ladies that
Shall follow him. I shall be one. A mouse
Besides, thou diest! [*Exit Attendant.*

HUON (*signs paper*).

It is sign'd—Farewell! [*Going.*

COUNTESS.

Stay!—To the full thou must redeem thy pledge.
Unless thou marriest, it is not sign'd.
The paper is but air, the ink but water;
Without fulfilling of the written deed;
And thou dost juggle with me shamefully,
Saying thou lovest me, and for thy oath

Enter DUKE.

DUKE.

Where's Huon ?

COUNTESS.

Gone to do thy will.

DUKE.

Who work'd this miracle ? I never dream'd
He would conform to it ! Who work'd it ?

COUNTESS.

I.

DUKE.

Thou ?

COUNTESS (*giving him the paper*).

There.

DUKE.

My child ! Thou art thy father's child,
My proud child still ! Where is he ?

COUNTESS.

In the chapel,
By this. The chaplain waits upon him there.
Catherine is in my room, expecting me.
So please you, sir, since I have help'd the match
Thus far, I'll e'en o'erlook the ceremony.

DUKE.

Do so.

My barque no more is fit for sea ;
A ripple threatens it with foundering,
Almost 'tis founder'd now. Did Huon tell thee
How he withstood me ?

COUNTESS.

All is known to me.
But pray you, for the sake of Catherine,

Grant him his freedom. 'Tis not meet her husband
Should drag the chain hath been unloosed from her.

DUKE.

This document accomplishes your wish,
E'en now prepared to win him to my purpose.
I give it freely, for I love the boy ;
Ay, now entirely love him ! See him married ;
And may he plight a happy, happy troth
To her he weds ! My child, I am failing fast.
'Tis time—don't heed !—go to the chapel—and
My blessing on the errand takes thee thither.

Enter Attendant.

Ha !—you are come in time, sir ! I shall need
Your help to my chamber. Tell the boy, I bless him !
Come hither, bless thee, too ! And bless the work
Thou goest to do ! While I remember it,
Regard Count Ulrick as thy father's friend,
One of his household now, with sanction of
The Prince of Milan. I am very feeble !
'Must to my chamber !

COUNTESS (*rushing towards him, and kneeling*).

Bless me again ! my father !

DUKE.

Again, my child ?—Again ! [*Blessing her.*]
Heaven bless thee ! It is wiscr—better knows
Thy good—can better help thee to't—ay !
Better than thy father ! May it bless thee, then,
And be its will, before thy father's, done ! [*Goes out.*]

COUNTESS.

Now, fail not Catherine, and the die is cast ! [*Goes out.*]

SCENE II.

The Corridor of the Castle.

Enter SIR CONRAD.

SIR CONRAD.

What calls the chaplain to his sacred post,
And why this privacy? About to pass
The porch, I was admonish'd 'twas forbid
To all to enter! 'Tis no day of fast,
No hour of customary rites! 'Tis nought
To me. I only wonder at its strangeness.

SIR RUPERT (*entering*).

Where is the Prince of Milan?

SIR CONRAD.

In the court-yard—
Unless departed thence this moment.

SIR RUPERT.

Find him,
And bring him to the chamber of the duke.
If on your way you meet the duke's physician,
In search of whom I go, he, too, is summon'd,
And tell him so.

SIR CONRAD.

Why, what's the matter?

SIR RUPERT.

Woe!

The duke!—the duke!—No question, but away!

SCENE III.

*Chamber of the Countess.**Enter CHRISTINA and the COUNTESS's Maid.*

CHRISTINA.

My mistress marry Huon?

MAID.

Even so!

Now hand in hand with him before the priest;
Unless the knot be tied already—said
The blessing and amen.

CHRISTINA.

No bridemaïd?

MAID.

Yes,
My lady.

CHRISTINA.

What! the Countess! bridemaïd she
To Catherine that was before a serf!
Yet she was ever fond of Catherine.

MAID.

You should have seen them both as forth they went,
Like two sweet sisters for the altar veil'd.

CHRISTINA.

A sudden marriage this!

MAID.

And lonely, too;
None but the principals admitted—friends
Nor attendants!

CHRISTINA.

It is strange! Well. Huon gets
A wealthy wife—a freewoman, to boot;

And, sooth to say, a worthy husband, she—
Ay, were she better still—for many a prince
Looks not his rank so well as Huon would
Were he one. Softly—they return—yes.

MAID.

No;
My mistress comes alone. How slow she moves !

Enter the COUNTESS faint, her Maid runs to support her.

COUNTESS.

Help to untie me, girl. I cannot lift
My hand to my head—and I want air ! Remove
My veil. There ! Now I breathe !—A minute only
And all the world seems changed. Is this my room ?
Art thou my waiting-maid ?—Am I myself ?
Where is my father ?

MAID.

In his chamber, lady.
He is complaining.

COUNTESS.

He is very old.
His life spun out into a very film.
I did not gainsay him ! Thank Heaven for that !
I would that I could go to him, but 'faith
My limbs have done their best to bring me hither.
I am next to dead ; almost dissolved to nothing.
Is that Christina ? Girl, what do you here ?
Home with all haste ; your mistress there before you
Waits your assistance with most instant need.

CHRISTINA.

It is all wonder.

COUNTESS.

Art thou gone ?

CHRISTINA.

I am.

[*Courtsies and goes out.*]COUNT ULRICK *enters.*

ULRICK.

Madam !

COUNTESS.

Count Ulrick, is it you ? I am glad
To see you, sir ; my father told me, or
I dreamt it, he designed to take you, sir,
Into his service. If 'tis so, I'm glad of it.

ULRICK.

I grieve to think my office was a brief one !

COUNTESS.

Your office was a brief one !—Speak !—alas !
When silence is a substitute for speech
The heart must be o'er full of joy or pain !
Enough. I read your errand in your looks—
I am an orphan.

ULRICK.

Madam, 'twas a debt
Long due to nature.

COUNTESS.

Still, sir, we must grieve
To see it paid. At what a time to leave me !
I cannot pay him half his dues of sorrow.
My heart is spent !—benumbed ! this shaft of Fate
Lights on a corpse !—a corpse ! Alas, my father !
[*A pause—Enter Attendant, hastily.*]

ATTENDANT.

Madam !

ULRICK.

Keep silence ! Do not interrupt
The sacred flow of sorrow for the dead.

COUNTESS.

No ; let him speak ; there's matter in his looks.

ATTENDANT.

'The banquet, as you ordered, is prepared,
But neither bride nor bridegroom can be found.

COUNTESS.

You mean the bride cannot be found !

ATTENDANT.

Nor yet
The bridegroom.

COUNTESS.

Search for him, and you will find him—

Must find him ! [Attendant goes out.]

What a cross ! at what a time !

When all my thoughts should be with him that's gone !

My father ! I did love my father, sir :

Indeed, I did !

ULRICK.

Then let me now fulfil

His last behest, whereof the substance this,

At length recorded here—which he enjoin'd

You should be instantly possessed of—proof

Of his most fatherly regard and care.

Of those who seek your hand you must make choice

Of one to share the labours of the dukedom,

Or else abide the issue of the lists—

Your suitors summon'd to a tournament—

When he who rests the victor wins your hand.

COUNTESS.

I am content! I'll do my father's will,
And bide the issue of the tournament,
Or choose myself the man shall take my hand.

ULRICK.

Jointly the Empress and myself are named
Executors, to give the will effect.

COUNTESS.

It was not needed. It had been respected
Without o'erlooking, how much less enforcement!
My brain and heart are here and there!—I haven't
The use of them. Some one did tell me now
Of something—what was it?

ULRICK.

One said the serf—

COUNTESS.

Call him that name again! Whom speak'st thou of?
Huon?

ATTENDANT (*entering*).

This letter is from Huon, madam.
Mounted upon a steed, your father's gift,
He threw it me, and fled.

COUNTESS (*reading*).

“Eternally
Farewell—your will is done—I use my freedom.
Fortune my mistress hence—the richest boon
She can award me, death!—One more farewell!”
O rashness most perverse and ruinous!
Let them pursue him; and provide them with
The fleetest of the stud, and gold beside,
For new relays. If they o’ertake him—if—
They must!—’tis an affair of life or death!
They must not quit him, but return with him—

ATTENDANT.

The bride—

COUNTESS.

No heed of her. Bring Huon back
By fair means or by foul—persuasion lost,
Let them resort to force—but not to harm
A hair of his head. So be their numbers such
As makes resistance idle. They are sure
To track him, so they lose not time—and see
They do not ! If they waste a moment only,
They answer for't. Stay, sir ! a purse of gold
To every one of them—of gold, you mark—
So that they bring him back; and one for you
In like event. A minute hence, observe,
I look into the court-yard, and expect
To see them in their saddles, and away !
Upon their lives I charge them bring him back !

[They go out.]

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

The Garden of the Castle.

Enter SIR RUPERT *and* SIR CONRAD.

SIR RUPERT.

TIME is the same. 'Tis our condition's changed.
The hours hang weary-heavy on our hands :
We scarce could catch when Catherine was here,
They went so fleetly by us. Then the death
Of the duke hath left a blank, which, while he lived,
Light offices, with grateful tasks fill'd up,
Forbade our spirits flag.

SIR CONRAD.

Eventful day,
The day he died ! Eventful day to us !
Our Catherine married Huon then, and fled ;
And Huon fled, avoiding Catherine ;
Nor since of either tidings—though for him
Almost the world was search'd. Strange, loathing him
As she did, with hate almost unnatural,
How much to heart the Countess took his flight.

SIR RUPERT.

Ay, as a gentle stream would take a rock,
Suppose one suddenly cast into it,
Damming its channel up, and making foam,
Where all before went crystal, without ripple,
But such as noteth gliding. Yes, 'twas strange.

SIR CONRAD.

'Twas very strange.

SIR RUPERT.

'Twas one of certain things
We see, yet question that we see, yet there
We know they are.

SIR CONRAD.

She pines for loss of him.

SIR RUPERT.

No, sir ; she takes to heart her father's will,
Compelling her to choose a husband, or
Accept of him the tournament may send her.
And so, she keeps alone ; to all forbidding
Approach to her, except this youth, who sits
In Huon's place, her secretary now,
The forward cousin of fair Catherine.

SIR CONRAD.

Strange, Catherine should fly, and Huon too !
That each should purpose, what, if known to each,
Had one accomplish'd, had sufficed for both,
To shun the consummation of the rites !
Strange, that the Duke that very day should die !

SIR RUPERT.

Untimely was the Duke's decease for us—
Prevented by his death from profiting
By the fair opening which the turbulent
And wild Bohemians for our lances made.
We could not take the field ; and, lo, the war,
Ere well commenced, is done ; concluded too
By single combat, and the conqueror
A knight unknown till now, whose championship
Had graced the proudest days of chivalry :

Of presence noble as his deeds are lofty,
By that confirming what by these he won—
The favour of the Empress. Yonder comes
The secretary.

SIR CONRAD.

Ay, 'tis he.

SIR RUPERT.

I fear
He laughs at us to give us hopes, as still
You know he does, that one of us shall yet
Make wife of Catherine. A forward spark !
I hate a stripling that's so much the man ;
It shows like aping. He grows worse and worse,
Since he hath got his office. For the sake
Of Catherine, alone, I bear with him.

SIR CONRAD.

He is like her ; never brother more like sister.
I have a word to say to you anon,
Touching to-morrow, when the tournament
Decides who weds the Countess, she declining
To choose a mate herself.

CATHERINE (*without, very loud*).

Ho ! holloa !

SIR RUPERT.

Ho !

[CATHERINE enters.]

Why call you, sir, so loud ?

CATHERINE.

To make you hear
News, sirs, from Catherine ! Shall I whisper it ?
She is coming !

SIR RUPERT.

So you told us months ago.

CATHERINE.

Well, when she comes she'll be the welcomer !

SIR CONRAD.

I'll wait for her no longer.

CATHERINE.

Wait for her ?

O ! ay ! a man may wait, and wait in vain.

I wait for a wife ; though the odds are ten to one,

As I'm a man, I'll die a bachelor.

Do you know the signs of one ?

SIR CONRAD.

No ; what are they ?

CATHERINE.

O, various ; but the chief, a cautious eye,

And calculating. He that scans a fence,

Doth seldom make a clever leap of it ;

Nine times in ten he balks his spring, and falls

In the ditch ; while he who takes it at a glance,

Goes flying over. Women are shrewd imps !

Behoves a man he thinks not of their pockets,

When he is looking in their faces ; for,

Wear he his eye ever so languishingly,

They'll find he's only working at a sum

In arithmetic. Sir Rupert, let me see

Your face ! Don't look so sullen at me. Who

Can see the sun if he's behind a cloud ?

That's right. I would not say, but when the woman

Kind heaven intends for wife to you shall come,

You'll marry her.

SIR CONRAD.

What say you of my face ?

CATHERINE.

The same I say of his. By my honour, sirs !

Though I may pass for an astrologer,

I never yet, believe me, made pretence

To read the stars ; nor am I adept yet
In palmistry ; nor have I studied signs
As lucky or unlucky omens ; yet
Things can I tell before they come to pass.

SIR CONRAD.

But shall I die a bachelor ?

CATHERINE.

You will,
Unless it chance, upon a certain day,
In a certain month, in such or such a year—
At present which is doubtful, but as sure
As time doth run 'twill come—you get a wife!
Now, there's a puzzle for you ; make it out,
And tell it me ; and then I'll tell it you,
If you are in the right. Your lot is cast
In mystery ; but, for Sir Rupert, his
Is plain ; 'tis right before me : I can tell
The year, the month, the week, the day, almost
The very hour, he will be married, or—
Not married ! yet am I no conjuror.
Where is Sir Otto ?

SIR CONRAD.

We are going to his house ;
He waits for us.

CATHERINE.

I'll follow. News wait I
From Catherine ; I'll bring it, if it comes.
Nay, sirs, beseech you, look not thus upon me
With eyes of marvel. On my word ! indeed,
And by my honour,—and, if nothing else
Will satisfy you, though I have ta'en an oath
'Gainst swearing, I will give it on my oath—
I am no conjuror ! Another word :

What I have told you, tell not, as you love me,
Lest I should pay for it by flood or faggot !
Upon my life, sirs, I am no conjuror !

[*They go out severally.*]

SCENE II.

A Room in the Castle.

Enter ULRICK.

ULRICK.

At length—the day almost arrived that brings
The tournament, whose issue brings to her
A consort for her state—she yields me audience.
Is it for loss of Huon she has pined,
And kept herself forbiddingly alone ?
If so, why give his hand to Catherine ?
This is a mystery, the which the more
I try to sound, the deeper doth it grow ;
While surmise after surmise rises, as
Report succeeds report of high exploits
Achieved by this unknown adventurer,
Who now stands next the Empress chief in place,
That even he and Huon are the same !
Should it be so, and he should come along,
What then the issue of her meeting with him ?
This I revolve, and with a troubled heart,
That sees no end to its perplexity. [Looks off.]
How changed she is ! Her fiery eye is quench'd !
Her head its haughty carriage hath abated,
Her cheek is beggared of its prideful flush.

Enter COUNTESS (a parchment in her hand).

COUNTESS.

I have perused the testament, my lord,

Carefully, word for word, and see no mention,
Either directly or by implication,
Touching the quality of him may win me.

ULRICK.

No, none is made; a slight omission only.

COUNTESS.

Yet space enough to let my will creep through.
You say, my lord, you have made proclamation
Of this fair passage far and wide?

ULRICK.

I have.

COUNTESS.

And now expect the Empress?

ULRICK.

Yes.

COUNTESS.

And with her?

ULRICK.

The noblest of her court; a glorious crowd;
Among the rest, her favourite; that youth
With whose exploits the wondering realm resounds,
Who, in so brief a space, without a name,
Has made himself the noblest which the tongue
Of high renown rings out.

COUNTESS.

That youth! what youth?

ULRICK.

A young adventurer, of whom it seems
Fair fortune is enamour'd—gives him all
He asks!

COUNTESS.

I never heard of him before.

ULRICK.

So please you, madam, you forget till now,

Since that your father died and Huon fled,
Save your new secretary, you have deign'd
With none vouchsafe communing.

COUNTESS.

You are right.
I have forgot the world, time, everything !
What is this favourite called ?

ULRICK.

His titles change
So fast—the former almost new as its
Successor—scarce I know now his present style.

COUNTESS.

His name I mean.

ULRICK.

His name I know not, madam.

COUNTESS.

What moves my heart, so leaden-dull before ?
Why did it leap at mention of the stranger ?
Has he been seen by any whom we know,
Any of our vassals, chiefs, or friends ?

[*Aside.*

ULRICK.

I have met
With none of these have seen him.

COUNTESS (*abstractedly*).

Happy woman !

ULRICK.

Madam ?

COUNTESS.

The Empress is a happy woman.
She can reward desert, ennoble it.

ULRICK.

So in this instance hath her highness done
With such profusion of munificence,

There are not wanting those who think she sees
Less with an empress' than a woman's eyes,
And means her bounties but as costly heralds,
Poor to the costlier comer they forerun.

COUNTESS.

What ! means she to 'espouse him ?

ULRICK.

'Tis surmised.

Matter to wonder at, yet justified.

For they report him of a presence noble,
As e'er bespoke a man to challenge honour.

COUNTESS.

I never dreamt of an abyss so hideous—
And to be standing on the very brink on't !

ULRICK (*alarmed at her vehemence*).

Madam !

COUNTESS.

Ay ! what's the matter ? (*Aside.*) I am frighten'd
At myself ! (*Aloud.*) My lord, my spirits are so dreamy,
Things which are not, I see—which are, see not !

Pray do not heed me. For this tournament,
Thus near without obstruction on my part
Hath it approached, but pray you keep in mind
On what condition ; that at any time
The husband it awards, revolting to me,
I am at liberty to make a choice
Between a husband and the cloister. So !
I'll read the will again. [*Sits down and reads.*]

STEPHEN (*entering hastily*).

News ! news ! my lord.

ULRICK.

What is it ?

STEPHEN.

Huon !

COUNTESS.

Ha !

Well, what of Huon, is he found ?

STEPHEN.

He is.

COUNTESS.

Propitious Heaven, at what a time ! where is he ?

STEPHEN.

In the suite of the Empress.

COUNTESS.

Well,—go on !

STEPHEN.

I saw him ! More. That sun of chivalry
Hath suddenly blazed forth in the brief war
So late gone by and dazzled friends and foes—
The fav'rite of the Empress—

COUNTESS.

Well ? Go on !

STEPHEN.

—Huon and he are one.

COUNTESS.

I was sure of it !

Send him away. [*She staggers to a seat, ULRICK supports her.*

ULRICK.

Hence, sir.

[STEPHEN goes out.

COUNTESS.

Don't wonder at me ! Don't !

Nor question me, whate'er I say or do !

Listen and do my bidding. I prepare

To give reception to the Empress,—thou

See Huon. Tell him I would speak with him

Soon as occasion serves; or let him make

Occasion, and at once—at once, my lord!

(*Aside.*) Where shall we meet? In the garden? No; the
garden

Is overlook'd. In the library? No;

We may be subject to intrusion there.

What should prevent his coming to my closet?

What place so fit? Why think of any other?

(*Aloud.*) My lord, bring Huon to my closet. Huon!

The favourite of the Empress I should say.

[*The COUNTESS and ULRICK go out severally.*]

SCENE III.

Sir Otto's House.

Enter SIR OTTO, SIR CONRAD, and SIR RUPERT.

SIR OTTO.

'Tis slight of fortune not to take the chance

She proffers; since the lists must open, sirs,

To every lance, why not adventure ours,

With such a prize? Wait you for Catherine.

I'm for the tournament.

SIR CONRAD.

And so am I.

This secretary is a subtle spark.

He has harp'd upon our suit to Catherine,

Awaken'd hopes we had given o'er as dead,

And pledged himself with oaths she would return

Free, as she ne'er had plighted troth to Huon,

And yet she comes not. What we take in earnest,

Be sure he only gives in mockery.

SIR OTTO.

I'm of your counsel, and will break a lance
To-morrow for the Countess.

SIR RUPERT.

Do so, sir.

I break no lance except for Catherine.

CATHERINE (*entering disguised as a man*).

CATHERINE.

Who talks of breaking lances?

SIR OTTO.

Ha ! our friend
The Secretary.

SIR CONRAD.

Well sir, what's your news ?
Where 's Catherine ?

CATHERINE.

Absorbed in solving, sir,
A knotty point.

SIR CONRAD.

A knotty point ; what is't ?

CATHERINE.

The measure of a lover's patience, sir.

SIR OTTO.

Does she not come ?

CATHERINE.

Not till that point is solved.
Now, could you solve it for her, she might come
The sooner.

SIR OTTO.

'Tis an hour.

SIR CONRAD.

A day.

SIR OTTO.

A week.

SIR CONRAD.

A month.

SIR OTTO.

A year.

CATHERINE (*to* SIR RUPERT).

Will you not make a guess?

SIR RUPERT (*sighing*).

It is a life !

CATHERINE.

Can't you go further, sir ?

Try if you can. Lovers do miracles :

'Tis said they do, ~~I never saw them though,~~

Nor met with those that did.

SIR OTTO.

Where is our mistress ?

CATHERINE.

Here,

Where'er she is ; or nowhere, where you are.

Have you a mistress, there your mistress is,

Were she at one end of the world and you

At the other.

SIR RUPERT.

Ay, were she in another world !

CATHERINE.

Why what's the matter with Sir Rupert ? Is

The gentleman gone mad ? I think myself

A sterling lover, but I take no oath,

Except to flesh and blood. Sir Rupert, what's

Your thought of a mistress ?

SIR RUPERT.

A vitality
Precious, peculiar, not to be supplied ;
Once with your being joined, a part of it
For ever !

CATHERINE.

Humph ! and you believe, Sir Rupert,
You have met with such a thing ?

SIR RUPERT.

I have.

CATHERINE.

And where ?

SIR RUPERT.

In Catherine.

CATHERINE.

Heaven help the man, he speaks
As if he thought himself in earnest, sirs.
Whom said he now he'd break a lance for ?

SIR CONRAD *and* SIR OTTO.

Her.

CATHERINE.

For Catherine, poor man ! far better break
A lance for the Countess ; as the lists, they say,
Are open to all challengers that bear
The rank of knighthood.

SIR OTTO.

So they are, and we
Design to try our fortune, and lament
Not to find Sir Rupert of our mind.

CATHERINE.

That mortifies you, does it ? So, Sir Rupert,
Will you make suit again to Catherine,

Say she comes back again, released from her
Enforced vow ?

SIR RUPERT.

Will I make suit to her ?
My heart is ever lying at her feet.

CATHERINE.

'Tis neighbour then, to an ungainly shoe.
She has broken her ankle, and the awkward leech
Who set it for her made a botch of it.
Her foot 's awry ; she limps ; her taper waist,
So straight before when she moved, goes zig-zag now.
Give your heart joy, sir, of its pleasant seat.

SIR RUPERT.

The gait and shape of gentle Catherine
Are in her heart, no fracture warping there.

SIR OTTO.

With what a serious face you play the cheat.

CATHERINE,

Sir, I look serious at a serious thing.

SIR CONRAD.

It is not as you say ?

CATHERINE.

Believe 'tis not ;
But take this with you, I should be more grieved
Than you would, to disparage Catherine.

SIR OTTO.

So Catherine doth halt ?

SIR CONRAD.

My love doth halt.

SIR OTTO.

And so doth mine.

CATHERINE.

I have not told him all.

SIR OTTO.

What, is there more to come?

CATHERINE.

Listen—you'll hear.

So sir, you make retainers of your eyes, [*To Sir Rupert.*
Nor feast at the same table, but eschew
Their homely fare, though men as noble deem
A well-turn'd leg a dainty, let that pass;
But give not me a mistress with a fair
Transparent skin, that you can see beneath
Tracery costlier than veins of gold
Suppose they lay in bed of alabaster;
It never stands the weather.

SIR OTTO.

Is she changed
In her complexion?

CATHERINE.

Do not urge me, sir,
To speak more than I do speak, speaking that
With pain.

SIR CONRAD.

What ! has she turn'd from ivory to—

CATHERINE.

Anything you please.

SIR CONRAD.

Mahogany?

CATHERINE.

You say it for me, I'm beholden to you;
'Tis hard to speak unwelcome things of friends.

SIR OTTO.

And hard to hear them too. Sir Rupert.

SIR RUPERT.

Well.

SIR OTTO.

Hear ye?

SIR RUPERT.

I do.

SIR OTTO.

And what resolve you?

SIR RUPERT.

What

I did resolve before—to break no lance
Except for Catherine. Her maiden thoughts—
Test to the daintiest conceit of love—
And generous affections, might unveil
Themselves to modesty without its blush,
Are Catherine's complexion!

[Retires.]

CATHERINE.

He is mad!

Isn't he, sir? Have twenty masses said,
That you preserve your wits! seeing the thing
That turn'd his brain for him, you all affect.
Think you 'twill bring him to his senses, sirs,
To tell him she hath squandered all her wealth?

SIR OTTO.

Better she halted in her gait than that!

SIR CONRAD.

Or cast her white skin for an Ethiop's!
You do not tell us so?

CATHERINE.

I'll tell it him.

SIR OTTO.

But is it so?

She was a prudent girl
Before she went.

CATHERINE.

Man, sir, is but a plant,
Although he holds no rank in botany ;
And as with change of climate plants will change,
Thrive more less, or take no root at all,
So man discovers strange diversity
Transferr'd to sun and soil not native to him.

SIR OTTO.

But are her riches dwindled ?

SIR CONRAD.

Has she shrunk,
Indeed, from affluence to poverty ?

CATHERINE

Sirs, you shall judge from one particular.
From morn till night she is in masquerade.
You wouldn't know her, though you look'd upon her,
Walk'd with her, talk'd with her. Can this be done
At light expense ? Moreover, sirs, she keeps
Bad company ; nor that of her own sex ;
Two arrant knaves especially, that stick
Like leeches to her, and will ne'er fall off
Long as she suffers them, while there's a drop
To gorge.

SIR OTTO.

She is ruin'd utterly.

SIR CONRAD.

Undone,
Beyond redemption. Look, Sir Rupert.

SIR RUPERT.

Well ?

SIR CONRAD.

Catherine's for hire ; she must take service ! All
(Her wealth is gone.

SIR RUPERT.

(*Cheerfully*) Is gone ?

SIR CONRAD.

It makes you glad !

SIR RUPERT.

Now could I woo her with the best of ye.
Her match in fortune, I could praise her now
Dreading no charge of venal flattery.
Fair sir, take pity on an honest heart
And loving one, and as you know the haunt
This gentle fawn hath slunk to, tell it me
That I may straight o'ertake and make her mine.

SIR OTTO.

Better you wait to-morrow's tournament,
As we shall.

CATHERINE.

Gentlemen, you do not know
Your man ! Tell me a linsey-woolsey maid,
With halting gait and saffron-colour'd skin,
And not a doit to make a market with them,
Could for a moment in comparison
Stand with the Countess ! who could credit it ?
The simple truth is this, your friend lacks mettle.

SIR RUPERT.

Sir !

CATHERINE.

He can bluster, that is evident.
See what a giant,—he would eat me up
If he could : but think you, sirs, I heed his club ?
Give me a straw, I'll face him. You mistake

Your friend ! his frame 's robust enough, but, 'faith.
His spirit is a lean one.

SIR RUPERT.

'Sdeath, sir !

CATHERINE.

Ho !

If you have sworn men into agues, sir,
Don't try your skill on me. My parrot swears
As well as you, and just as much I heed him.

SIR RUPERT (*drawing*).

It passeth all endurance—pshaw, a stripling !

CATHERINE.

A stripling, sir, to make an oak afeard.

SIR RUPERT (*again drawing*).

Indeed !

CATHERINE.

As I do live his sword is out !
But he's a spaniel, as I'll prove to you,
Who thinks he bites by showing you his teeth.
Here's for you, sir—(*draws*)—but hold, what day is this? . .

SIR CONRAD.

Friday.

CATHERINE.

I never fight on Fridays, sirs.
My killing days are all the rest of the week,
E'en Sundays not excepted. Sirs, your friend
Is a coward. [*Coolly puts up her sword.*]

SIR RUPERT.

Furies !

CATHERINE.

Fiends and all sorts of imps !
Swearing won't save you, sir. I'll prove my words.
I dare you, at the tournament to-morrow,

To break a lance with me. Observe you, sirs,
He shakes from head to foot at the thought of it,
Though now he pass it off with swaggerings.
He dares as soon confront stout Charlemagne,
Were he alive, as me. I'll wager you
My sword to your dagger, he takes flight to-day,
And waits not for to-morrow.

SIR RUPERT.

Will I not !
I will have satisfaction. I accept
His challenge. I will have satisfaction, sirs.

CATHERINE.

You shall, and have it to your heart's content.
Take linsey-woolsey with a halt, and the skin
Of a negro, rather than essay a tilt
With chance to win a Countess ! I could laugh
To scorn the man that would believe him. Oh !
He shall have satisfaction. I could beat him
With a rush in rest. He shall have satisfaction !
Sirs, he will cower at very sight of me ;
Fall on his knees, and beg his of me
With clasped hands. He shall have satisfaction !
[*They go out severally.*

SCENE LAST.

A Room in the Castle.

Enter COUNTESS.

COUNTESS.

It is confirm'd—the place he holds beside her
Her every action speaks. Of all her court,
He is the only one, whose duties to her

She takes as favours, not as things of course.
 He comes ! Who stops him thus untimely ? Oh,
 How changed he is !—The fiery hardihood
 Of the life he hath of late made consort of,
 Hath given another spirit to his eyes.
 His face is cast anew, as circumstance
 Could alter Nature's modelling and work,
 Improving on her mould. Is that the man
 Was once my father's serf, and I did scorn ?
 Fell ever at my wayward frown that brow ?
 Or stoop'd that knee, for me, to kiss the ground ?
 Would they do it now ? Fell ever at my feet
 That form, as prostrate as the hand of death
 Had struck it to the floor ? 'Twould take that hand
 To lay it now there—and a wave of mine
 Had done it once ! If he confesses hold
 Of any other, never shall he learn
 His hold of me ! but, if he strives in love,
 I bless my stars I have the 'vantage ground.

[*Huon enters, and remains standing at a distance, with
 his eyes on the ground.*]

COUNTESS.

Is Huon here, and does not Huon speak ?
 Absent so long, no greeting for a friend—
 A woman, too ! (*Pauses*)—no salutation kind,
 Preclude of happy news she'd joy to hear,—
 Relation of adventures she would thrill
 To listen to,—exploits she would wonder at
 And the next moment at her wonder blush,
 Knowing whose arm achieved them !

[*Pauses.*]

[*Pauses.*]

HUON.

I am glad
 To find you well.

COUNTESS.

You are glad to find me well ?
I hope you are ! It were not saying much,
I trust, to say I know you are ! You are glad
To find me well ! Is that your news for me ?
If 'tis, it is strange news.

HUON.

You wish'd to see me,
And I am here to learn your will.

COUNTESS.

More news !
You are a friend worth parting with, you bring
Such marvels home with you. Sometime methinks
Since last we met together, and you are glad
To find me well ; and, as I wished to see you,
You are here to learn my will ! You were not here
Had not I sent for you.

HUON.

It would have been
Presumptuous.

COUNTESS.

Presumptuous !

HUON.

Yes, madam,
In the scrf.

COUNTESS (*with sudden indignation*).

No, sir, not in the favourite
Of the Empress !—Huon, this is not the way
We ought to meet ! It should not be in anger.
You are come home, and you are welcome home.
Requires my tongue a backer to get credence ?
Well ! there 's my hand beside. Do you not take
My hand ?

HUON.

You are a noble lady, madam,
Whose father was my lord, by leave of whom
I thought and had a will—did what I did—
Yea, kept the very blood within my veins.
Behoves it I should take his daughter's hand?

COUNTESS.

You mock me.

HUON.

Would I did, and 'twere a dream!
But dreams are not repeated day by day,
And day by day reminds me of a time
I was your father's serf.

COUNTESS.

No more of this.

HUON.

Oh! would no more! The wounded body heals,
The pain is over, all is sound again,
A scar reminds you of it—nothing more!
Not so the heart, you lacerate it once!
Habit may dull, pursuit engross—divert—
But never are you ransom'd from the throe.
Live your meridian out it comes again,
Fresh as at first, to make you writhe anew.

COUNTESS.

We do not meet to talk of grievances,
Huon. I offer'd you my hand just now.
Why do you weep? I did not give it you
To kiss it with your tears!

HUON.

O, 'tis a hand
Thou hast forbidden mine to meet.

COUNTESS.

No, Huon,

Not as friends!—(*recovering herself*)—I'll see him clearly
first— [Aside.]

Sit down and let us talk. I have fifty things

I want to say to you, yet know not which

To begin with. Huon, do you like the Empress?

HUON.

Like her!

COUNTESS.

Yes; like her,—that's the word I said.

Perhaps it should be "love her"?

HUON.

Love her, madam!—

COUNTESS (*interrupting him*).I see you do! Go on? What were you going
To say?

HUON.

O, contrast marvellous! beyond

Belief of nature!

COUNTESS.

Ay! 'twixt her and me!

Go on! The contrast? Best we understand

Each other! Well? The contrast?

HUON.

'Twere as one

Should find the sun by following the night!

Should plunge into her regions, and for chill,

And gloom, and sterileness, find light, and warmth,

And verdure,—such as should belong to day!

'Twere as death owned a heart, and life had none

But with the shows of animation

Did lodge within its breast a core of stone,
While the still ribs of death had pulse within them!

COUNTESS.

Am I that day, that life, compared to which
Death, night, are e'en so rich? Is she thou servest
That death, that night, preferr'd to life and day?

HUON.

O, I did love thee to oblivion
Of myself! What Nature gave me to assert
The man neglecting, as despised things
Compared to thee! That she intended me
For deeds of nobleness I may confess,
Seeing that others own I have achieved them.
Yet I abused her bounties,—and, for what?
Scorns—wrongs—through love of thee preferr'd them!
And which I bore; until the cause itself,
That made me bear them, thou didst make a means
Of yet unknown oppression. *That* I bore!
But there did patience cease. Yes! not, until
Coerced there, where, spared, I were content
To last the thrall of passion's lethargy,
Did I rebel! But when I was struck down
Prostrate, as, for the sake of flesh and blood,
Behoves not slaves to lie,—with marvel on't
I waked to sense of what I ought to be!
Of what, against my will, 'twas past the sport
Of power to change me from! A MAN!—and straight
A man I started up! a man, resolved
To use his attributes as fits a man
To vindicate the ancient, common birth-right,
And answer the design of Him that framed him!

COUNTESS.

So ! you have register'd your debts to me,
No item overlooked thou knowest of.
What, now, if I could name to thee one debt
Would blot out all the rest ?—not known to thee,
A debt thy dreams did never give thee glimpse of,—
Thy dreams where thou didst soar, didst cast away
The clog, last morn put on, and mount as high
As e'er ambition left at large could wing,
Daring the eagle to come up to thee !

HUON.

No debt that thou couldst name were gain to me.
I keep no register of aught between us.
Or, if I do, I never turn to it,
Unless enforced, as now. Whate'er has pass'd,
Is pass'd, and, profitless to memory,
Were better be forgotten.

COUNTESS.

Ay ? Indeed !
So easily done ? Well, be it so ! 'Tis past,
And so should be forgotten. Please you, now
Turn to the Empress. You have painted me ;
Proceed to her. Come, let me see what hand
You will make of her picture. When I ask'd you now
If you liked her, you did echo me !—and then
I ask'd you if you loved her, and again
You echo'd me ! I want an answer, not
An echo. Well, sir ? well ?

HUON.

Madam, I love
And honour her. (*She starts from her seat ; he rises also.*)

COUNTESS.

Thou art rewarded, pride !
Meet'st thy deserts ! Show thy high breeding now !
Tread stately ! throw thy spurning glances round !
And talk as mighty things as though the earth
Were made for thee alone ! Where 's thy domain ?
Gone ! And thy palace, what is it ? a ruin !
And what art thou thyself ? a beggar now !
Huon, you loved me once ! (*Bursting into tears.*)

HUON.

I loved thee once !
Oh, tell me, when was it I loved thee not ?
Was't in my childhood, boyhood, manhood ? Oh !
In all of them I loved thee ! And were I now
To live the span of my first life, twice told,
And then to wither, thou surviving me,
And yet I lived in thy sweet memory,
Then might'st thou say of me, " He loved me once ;
But that was all his life ! "

COUNTESS.

'Twas heart for heart !
I loved thee ever ! Yes ! the passion now
Thrills on the woman's tongue ; the girl's had told thee,
Had I been bold as fond ; for even then
I saw thy worth, but did not see thy station,
Till others, not so well affected towards thee,
Reveal'd it to me by their cold regards.
I could not help my nature. From that time
Two passions strove in my divided soul
For mastery—scorn of thy station, love
For thee—each feeding on the other's hate,
And growing stronger ; till I thought their strife

Would shake my frame to dissolution ! Yes !
Oh, Huon ! when my brow sat cloudy oft
O'er my cold eye, that look'd askant at thee,
Thou' little thought what friend there was within
Would make that brow clear as a summer sky,
That eye bright, glowing as a summer's sun,
To kindle thee—as they, their world, with life,
And health, and wealth, and gladness !

HUON.

Say'st thou this
To me ? or do I dream I hear thee say it ?
Or is the past a dream ? I did not yield
At thy command, to marry Catherine ?
Thou didst not see me wed her ? Fancy forged
The ring I thought I put upon her finger ?
Thou wast not by at all ? From first to last,
Hadst not a hand in it ? or, if thou hadst,
Why then untimely this unfold to me ?
For I do know thee to be pride of all
Proud honour's children ! Art thou offspring prime
Of cruelty as well ? O, Heaven, to think
She loved me, and could give me to another,
Nor yet to her alone !—another !—

COUNTESS.

Ha ! Well ?

HUON.

—One who ne'er set eyes on me until
An outcast, by her deed of hate who loved me !
To one, a stranger, saw me seeking fortune,
And gave the hand to me could help me to her !
Lavish'd her favours on me !—lit me up

With honours, till beside the bright themselves
I lost no brightness !

COUNTESS.

To the Empress ?

HUON.

Yes !

Thou lovest me ?—O, fate ! There was a time,
'Twere more than bliss, if more could be, to know it ;
But now 'tis misery !

COUNTESS.

'Tis misery ! [COUNTESS *starts up again*, HUON *also rising*.
Art thou in such a strait indeed as that,
To give my love for thee so harsh a name ?
What shall I call it then ? Gain me a name
Will stand for something worse than misery—
Will paint the case of a high, noble maid,
Who stoop'd to love a serf ; nay, stopp'd not there,
But told her passion to him—Misery !

HUON.

I am no more a serf.

COUNTESS.

Thou art ennobled ;
Yet art thou still the same, thou hast won honours ;
Rewards of deeds, in spite of thy base blood
Achieved by thee !

HUON.

Nay, madam, spare my blood,
And pardon me, its owner, if I say
It is not base.

COUNTESS.

It is ! what should it be
But base ? A serf did give it thee, a serf

Gave him his blood ! Trace back the current, sir,
Far as you can, and you will find it base,
Nothing but base.

HUON.

Madam, men's natures are
Their blood ; they have no other—high or low.
If base the current hitherto of mine,
It ceased with me. Born in thy father's house
A serf, I left it one, to seek my fortune,
Make it or mar it, for promotion having
No other patron than my own right arm,
And my own heart and head to guide and nerve it ;
And with their help, I see that house again,
An independent, self-exalted man,
While many a son, who left a noble home
With blood untainted for a thousand years,
Returns to it no better than he left it.
Is my blood base ?

COUNTESS.

No, Huon ! mine was base
To let me call it so. Alas ! alas !
And hast no better welcome for my love
Than that sad word thou spok'st ?

HUON.

What word so fit ?
What is it to a man condemn'd to die,
To tell him of a treasure left to him ?
Shall he be glad and thank his lucky stars,
Or shall not that, their bounty, aggravate
The ruin, makes it vain !

COUNTESS.

Condemn'd to die ?
Resemblest thou a man condemn'd to die ?

· HUON.

Why didst thou drive me from thee by that act?

COUNTESS.

That act was nothing ; 'twas thy flight,
And that which follow'd it. Thou art entangled—
And thank thy flight. Oh ! Huon, were thy love
In daring enterprise the tithe of mine,
'Twould attempt something to enlarge thee from
The cause thou art prisoner to !

HUON.

It cannot cease,
Except with life.

COUNTESS.

The Empress loves thee, Huon !

HUON.

No.

COUNTESS.

But she does.
Thou art her favourite. She
Hath chain'd thee to her throne.

HUON.

No.

COUNTESS.

But she has !
Thou hast made merchandise,
'Most shameful, merchandise, of thy allegiance !
Broken oaths as tiny shells which at a touch
Do fall to powder !

HUON.

Broken oaths !

COUNTESS.

Yes, oaths !
Thy life was all one oath of love to me !
Sworn to me daily, hourly, by thine eyes,
Which, when they saw me, lighten'd up as though
An angel's presence did enhance their sense,
That I have seen their very colour change,
Subliming into lines past earthliness.
Talk of the adjuration of the tongue—
Compare love's name, a sound which any life
May pipe ! a breath ! with holy love itself !
Thou'rt not forsworn, because thou took'st no oath ?
What were thy accents then ? thy accents, Huon ?
O ! they did turn thy lightest words to oaths,
Vouching the burden of a love-fraught soul !
Telling a tale which my young nature caught
With interest so deep, was conn'd by heart
Before I knew the fatal argument !
Huon, I charge thee quit the service of the Empress !

HUON.

'Twere against all honour.

COUNTESS.

No !
Give up her service !

HUON.

'Twere ingratitude.

COUNTESS.

Ingratitude, for what !

HUON.

She has advanced me
Past my deserts.

COUNTESS.

No, I deny it ! No !

Not equal to them ! No ! Thy golden deeds
She has repaid with tinsel !

ULRICK (*entering*).

Please you, sir,
The Empress summons you.

COUNTESS.

You are not going ?

HUON.

My presence is commanded.

COUNTESS.

Are you going ?

ULRICK.

My lord !

HUON.

I come.

COUNTESS.

You are going, then ?

HUON.

I must go.

COUNTESS.

You must ? Then go ? Go, and farewell for ever !

[*They go out.*]

ACT V.

SCENE I.

The Hall of the Castle.

The EMPRESS, Courtiers, Knights, Heralds, &c. prepared to proceed to the Tournament.

Enter ULRICK.

EMPRESS (*to ULRICK*).

WHY wait we for the Countess? What delays her?

This day is dedicate to her; for her

We are convened; and comes she last of all

ULRICK.

Madam, she craves your favour for this pause.

Believe 'tis not remissness, but mischance,

Retards her. Doubtless, she will come, anon.

EMPRESS.

Anon, my lord! Anon is not our time

For friends to greet us, when they summon us.

Enter three Attendants, the first bearing a coronet on a cushion, the second a pile of parchments, the third followed by Vassals, carrying money-coffers; last of all, the COUNTESS, plainly attired, followed by her Women, in costly dresses. She stops before the EMPRESS.

EMPRESS.

Why, lady! what is this?

COUNTESS.

My liege, receive

This emblem of that pomp which I resign,

Because 'tis adjunct to conditions, such
As render it a burden to me, past
The faculty of sufferance to bear.

EMPRESS.

Lady !

COUNTESS.

So please you, madam, give me leave.
As joint executor with this worthy lord,
Into your hands I also yield all right
And title to this fair chateau, besides
The lands and forests, its appendages,
As well as vassals, natives of the soil.

EMPRESS.

But, lady—

COUNTESS

Madam, suffer me conclude.
These are the coffers which my father left,
And as he left them render'd to your highness ;
And with them all resign'd, save such endowment
As shall entitle me to that retreat
Holy and calm, wherein I mean to pass,
I'll say, the remnant of my days, i' th' hope,
Though few are past, still fewer are to come.
Which option, as you know, my father's will
Has left to me.

EMPRESS.

Then will you not abide
The cast of fate in the tournament? nor take
The husband she may send—nor yet select
Yourself?

COUNTESS.

I cannot, madam.

SCENE I.]

LOVE.

EMPRESS.

How?

COUNTESS.

I am
Forestall'd.

EMPRESS.

By whom?

COUNTESS.

By you!

EMPRESS.

Let every one
Repair to the tournament. Let it proceed,
As we ourself were there. And you, my lord,
[To ULRICK.

Preside for us. It is our will the lists
Be open'd straight. The Countess stays with me.
[All go out, except the EMPRESS and COUNTESS.

We are alone! Now, how am I a let
To such espousals as your choice would make?

COUNTESS.

Do you not know?

EMPRESS.

Girl, be direct with me,
Nor in the headlong passion of your soul,
That seems to joy in strife and wrack, forget
'Tis your liege lady that vouchsafes you audience.

COUNTESS.

That I forget, and everything beside,
Except one thing, in still revolving which
The earth hath shrunk in estimation
Into a grain—the sun into a spark!
Nought hath kept substance but my desolation,

Which seems to me to fill up space itself
Till nothing else hath room.

EMPRESS.

Thy desolation ?
Who made it for thee ?

COUNTESS.

Thou !

EMPRESS.

In what regard ?

COUNTESS.

In thy attractive favour shown to Huon !

EMPRESS.

I made thy desolation ? Thou thyself
Didst make it with thy pride, the greater, but
Worse portion of thee !

COUNTESS.

By my pride ?

EMPRESS.

Thy pride,
Which, evil counsellor to thy love, advised it
To blush with shame at homage from the which
It could not yet refrain, because 'twas due—
Tribute to such desert, as far behind
Left all desert beside, and might have worn
The subject's heart—whose mistress's it won !—
Thy story—everything are known to me.

COUNTESS.

Then thou confessest it !

EMPRESS.

What ?

COUNTESS.

What ?

EMPRESS.

Beware !

I brook not such a tone from thee.

COUNTESS.

The heart

Will speak, despite the checks of shows and forms,

Shadows compared to its realities !

Is it not so with thee ?—e'er hast thou felt

A pang ?—and if thou hast, whose, then, thy palace ?

Thy retinue ?—thy guards ?—thy empire ?—Gone

With all their proud appurtenances, and

No habitation left thee, but thy breast,

The only house of happiness or woe !

How shall it be with me, then, with a heart

Madden'd with torture ? Shall I cast about

To furnish looks, and words, and tones for things,

I have no interest in, and thou, that hast,

In equal case wouldst give to disregard ?

EMPRESS.

Remember thou 'rt a subject !

COUNTESS.

So I will

While thou 'rt the empress ; but when thou becomest

A woman—a mere woman like myself—

Stepp'st from the eminence that lifts thee 'bove me—

Level'st thee to me in one common nature—

I deal with thee as woman deals with woman !

I own thy power ! I must, and do ! Thy breath

Can doom me exile, bondage, what it will !

There I submit ! Thou art the empress there.

But when thou thwart'st me in the interests

Which are the right not more of one than all—

Trenchest upon my private peace—my love —
Thou dost me wrong, for which I challenge thee
As equal may an equal.

EMPRESS.

Come ! Thy challenge ?
What dost allege against me ?

COUNTESS.

Thou dost love him !

EMPRESS.

Ay, by my troth, as much as thou didst scorn him !

COUNTESS.

He did accuse me to thee ?

EMPRESS.

Wayward woman,
He never spoke of thee, except with love.

COUNTESS.

How couldst thou love him then ? How could thy great-
ness

Forget itself to try and steal a heart,
Thou knew'st to be another's ?

EMPRESS.

Steal !

COUNTESS.

Ay, steal !

Must we coin terms for those that are above us,
To make offences gracious to their ears,
When they commit them—which, by us enacted,
Would blast with damning names !

EMPRESS.

Thou hast a spirit !

COUNTESS.

Thou knew'st he loved me, and didst covet him !

Covet a heart at second-hand—an Empress!
Hear me that am a subject, and thy subject—
His heart was mine, till thou didst rob me of it;
Not of it all, but of a part—though if
A part be gone, go all! Well, as I said,
His heart was mine at first. 'Tis gone—my peace,
Hopes, everything, along with it! What then?
Would I have it back?—No!—I would sooner die!
Its worth was its fidelity—that lost,
All's lost. Thou covetedst a faithless heart!

EMPRESS.

Didst thou deserve that heart?

COUNTESS (*weeping*).

I did!—I loved him
Better than thou couldst do!

EMPRESS.

I'faith, thou 'rt brave!
Thy love of him was persecution.

COUNTESS (*weeping*).

Yet
I loved him!

EMPRESS.

Loved him! It was tyranny,
Enforced without the mercy of a pause.

COUNTESS (*weeping still, and more bitterly*).

The more I loved him!

EMPRESS.

Loved him!—and constrain'd him
To nuptials he abhorr'd.

COUNTESS.

I did—and then
I loved him most!

[*In an agony of tears.*]

EMPRESS.

How had it fared with him,
Hadst thou been I ?

COUNTESS.

Far differently.

EMPRESS.

How ?

COUNTESS.

I then had been above rebuke or blame !
I would have given his merits their fair field,
Encouraged them to challenge their deserts,
Rewarded them till they had lifted him
So near equality to me, the seat
I fill'd, he might have shared along with me.

EMPRESS.

That field he found himself, without my aid.
I saw him there, and challenged simple greatness,
In spite of its disguise ; desired it doff
Its lowly suit, and show the thing it was ;
Nor stopp'd till, step by step, I saw it climb
To where it stands ; nor mean I to stop there.

COUNTESS.

How ?

EMPRESS.

I design for him the highest grace
I can bestow.

COUNTESS.

The highest !

EMPRESS.

Yes, beyond
His hopes, until to-day—until to-day,
Never divulged to him.

COUNTESS.

He knows it, then ?

EMPRESS.

He does ; and, till my promise is fulfill'd,
With fears that shake him spite of certainty
Of his immeasurable happiness—
For such he thinks it—wears a doubtful life.

COUNTESS.

Thy hand !

EMPRESS.

The hand of her, more proud to be
The empress of his heart than of my realm.

COUNTESS.

He shall not take it !

EMPRESS.

Not ?

COUNTESS.

Thy power is huge,
But there are bounds to it !

EMPRESS.

What bounds ?

COUNTESS.

Right !—Law !—
Imperial foot stops there. It dares not cross,
And if it dares, it shall not.

EMPRESS.

Faith, thou'rt brave !

COUNTESS.

He shall not marry !

EMPRESS.

No ?

COUNTESS.

No !

EMPRESS.

Gods, a rock !
She echoes me!

COUNTESS.

~~He~~ shall not marry !

EMPRESS.

What !
Again ?

COUNTESS.

Wast thou the empress of the world,
I'd say to thee again—he shall not marry !

EMPRESS.

Thou know'st a let ?

COUNTESS.

I do !

EMPRESS.

The troth he pledged
To Catherine—you see I am advised
Of all ! The marriage is annul'd.

COUNTESS.

It is ?

EMPRESS.

It is !

COUNTESS.

How ?

EMPRESS.

By the church !

COUNTESS.

The church ? And yet
He shall not marry !

EMPRESS.

What ! Not marry thee ?

COUNTESS (*changing, and falling on her knees*).
Madam !

EMPRESS.

The hand that I design for him—
Crown of my favour, his deserts—is thine,
Not mine, my girl—the guerdon fair for which
He would not take my empire in exchange—
Ay, with my hand, to boot !

COUNTESS.

My liege, my empress !

EMPRESS.

My fiery queen, and have I tamed you now ?
Tamed you so soon ? I half repent me on't.
Mine's the true spirit namesake ! It admires
To see itself in others. 'Faith, my glass
Never reflected me more honestly
Than thou didst even now. Listen to me.
I am thy Huon's friend and nothing more.
Rise. Now we'll talk as sister does with sister.
Hither thy Huon bears me company—
Unwarn'd to what intent until to-day ;
Until to-day, in darkness that the bar
The church, with thy fair aid, 'twixt him and thee
Did set—the church, at my persisting suit,
Hath quite annull'd ; and now he's in the lists
Striving to win thee ! He that never yet,
In strait of life or death, much less a tilt,
Suffer'd defeat. (*Trumpets*)—That flourish is the close.
Smile at it, girl ! It makes thee Huon's wife !
Huon—no more the serf—but nobleman—
Nor nobleman alone ! This hour a prince,
For thy fair sake !

COUNTESS (*dejectedly to herself*).

Would he were still the serf.

EMPRESS.

Dejected girl!

COUNTESS.

Madam.

EMPRESS.

They come! come hither!

Here take thy seat in the centre. Here thou art chief.

We are but second! Smile—thy Huon comes!

[*Music. ULRICK and the rest re-enter from the
Tournament. The EMPRESS anxiously surveys
them. The COUNTESS absent and dejected.*

Where is he?

COUNTESS.

Madam?

EMPRESS.

Which is Huon?

[*Aside to COUNTESS.*

COUNTESS.

Which?

EMPRESS (*aside to COUNTESS*).

Methinks he is not here can make him out.

Girl, tell me is thy lover here or not?

He seems not here, and yet he must be here.

HERALD.

Madam; the lists are closed. The victor waits
The prize which he has won. Shall he receive it?

EMPRESS (*aside to COUNTESS*).

Shall I say yes? I must say yes. Thou smilest.

I will say yes!—He shall receive the prize. (*Aloud.*

Who is that that bows?

HERALD.

The victor, madam.

EMPRESS (*to* COUNTESS).

Ha ! Do you know him ?

COUNTESS.

Not in his armour ; yet

Methinks I ought to know him were it he.

EMPRESS.

Sir Knight, so please you, raise your visor. 'Tis
The prince of Milan ! Girl—what means thine eye
To blaze with joy ? It looks on thy despair !
The prince of Milan 'tis has won the day.
Hear'st thou me ? Know'st thou what I say ?

COUNTESS.

I do !

Both hear and comprehend thee.

EMPRESS.

Ay, and smile.

COUNTESS.

And smile.

EMPRESS.

Art thou thyself ? Am I myself ?
I think myself the same ! Where is Huon ?

ULRICK.

Gone

To take his armour off.

EMPRESS.

How fared it with him ?

ULRICK.

He entered first the lists, and one by one
O'erthrew all comers, till the prince of Milan
Unhorsed him.

COUNTESS.

Is he hurt?

ULRICK.

No, madam.

COUNTESS (*starting up*).

Thanks!

My Lord, bring Huon hither! Hither! Hie!

Now all is as it should be.

EMPRESS.

Should be, girl?

Say rather should not be. Thy lover's foil'd.

Where is the ashy cheek that meets disaster,

The brow that's like the wrack? the gusty breath?

The quivering bloodless lip and quaking frame?

These should be and they are not! Where are they?

Or rather wherefore see I in their stead

Things 'twould become to wait on holidays

Rather than days of penance? Look not thus,

Else thou wilt make me hate thee!

COUNTESS.

Madam, madam,

I tell thee, and believe me, all is well.

EMPRESS (*indignantly*).

Then let the prince of Milan take his prize.

FREDERICK.

I claim it on my knee!

(*At the moment the Prince kneels, HUON led by ULRICK enters,
and the COUNTESS rushes towards him.*)

COUNTESS.

How is it, Huon?

Thou look'st as hurt.

HUON.

Sped in the spirit, lady.
Forgetful of my charger, all unmindful
He lack'd my argument to hearten him,
Bent on the most surpassing prize alone,
I did not think to change him and he fail'd me.

COUNTESS.

Fortune, farewell! and pride go with thee! Go!
Welcome adversity! Shake hands with me
Thou tester of true hearts! whose homely fare
No flatterer sits down to—hollow friend,
Foe, masking thoughts of scorn with smiling face—
But truth and honesty! affection staunch!
That grasps the hand before it scans the sleeve,
And greets the lowly portal with a grace
More winning far than his, who thanks the gate
That spreads with pride, to let a monarch in.

EMPRESS.

Girl, I am loth to speak in terms of blame,
But thou hast much offended courtesy:
Not only slighting me, thy sov'reign lady,
But him to whom thy fate awards thee bride!

COUNTESS.

A wife must be a widow ere a bride.

EMPRESS.

A wife? no wife art thou!

COUNTESS.

I am a wife!
Before this goodly presence I proclaim it.
A wife by stealth, but still a wedded wife!
Wedded for love, as fervent, durable,
As ever led a woman to the altar!

EMPRESS.

Where is thy husband ? where is thy husband ?

COUNTESS.

Where my remorse, contrition, deprecation,
Homage, and love, now throw me ! I am kneeling
At his feet ! [Kneels to HUON]

HUON.

Thy husband, I ?

COUNTESS.

My husband, thou !

HUON.

Was I not wed to Catherine ?

COUNTESS.

My name is Catherine, as thou shouldst know,
But, as thou knewest not, till now ; the lips
Pronounced that name in wedding thee—the hand
Then given to thee—the troth then plighted thee—
Were mine as truly as the breath that now
Avows I am thy wife !—in debt to fate
For baffling thee, for now she owns thee lord
In thy adversity !

HUON.

Thou kneel'st to me !
I marvel of thy words !—I overlook'd thee,
Madam !—My wife, rise !—pray you, rise !—my own,
My dear liege lady ever ! I am feeble
In words ; but, oh ! the strife is strong within,
Of wonder, gratitude, humility,
Pride, honour, love, outdoing one another !

Enter CATHERINE, disguised.

CATHERINE.

Fair Empress, justice !

EMPRESS.

Who asks for justice?

CATHERINE.

One that is most wrong'd
In his honour; cheated by a craven knight,
Who promised him to give him meeting here;
But hath broken his word—no doubt, through cowardice.

EMPRESS.

What is his name?

CATHERINE.

Sir Rupert.

SIR RUPERT (*stepping forward*).

He speaks false!

I am here to my appointment.

CATHERINE.

Are you so?

Are you not maim'd in the arm?

SIR RUPERT.

No!

CATHERINE.

Nor in the leg, that you can't sit your horse?

SIR RUPERT.

No!

CATHERINE.

That is still more wonderful! Nor yet
In your spirit?

SIR RUPERT.

No!

CATHERINE.

Most wonderful of all!
You do not mean to say you have the heart
To fight with me?

SIR RUPERT.

That you shall see anon.

CATHERINE.

Anon, sir? now! but where are your good friends?

SIR RUPERT.

Here! [SIR OTTO and SIR CONRAD come forward.]

CATHERINE.

Gentlemen, I am sorry for the fall
You got in tilting for the Countess; but
'Tis nothing to the one which he shall rue,
As you shall see. Down on your knees and beg
Your life.

SIR RUPERT.

And beg my life!

CATHERINE.

Now what 's the use
Of pondering, on that which must be done.
Do not you know, sir,—have you borne cuffs
A thousand times, as well I know you have,
And know you not a bold face never yet
Made a bold heart? Down on your knees at once!
Valour won't come for stamping, sir! entreat
Your friends to hold you, that's a better way
To pass for a brave man.

SIR RUPERT.

I'll smite thee.

CATHERINE.

Do!

If you dare! [Throwing off cloak.]
Ha! Have I brought thee to thy knee at last, sir?

Said I not I would bring thee to thy knees?
Beware I say not I will keep you there.

SIR RUPERT.

What ! Catherine ?

COUNTESS.

Yes, Catherine, Sir Rupert.

SIR RUPERT.

O happiness !

COUNTESS.

Which thou hast well deserved.

SIR RUPERT.

Thou still wast gracious to me.

COUNTESS.

For thy truth,
Attested by thy jealous poverty.
I saw thy honest love for Catherine,
In secret cherish'd, as thou thought'st—as one
Conceals a costly treasure he has found,
And rightfully may keep, but being poor,
Doth fear to own, through the world's charity.
Thy Catherine, before thou fear'dst to claim,
Is render'd back to thee, confess'd thine own.
And with her, tender'd thanks, for sacrifice
In self-denying love and trust to me.

CATHERINE.

O more than paid in profiting her friend.

COUNTESS.

Yet to be paid ! How, canst thou forgive

The scornful maid, for the devoted wife
Had cleaved to thee, though ne'er she own'd thee lord?

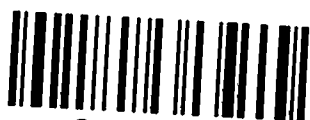
HUON.

I nothing see, except thy wondrous love.

COUNTESS.

Madam, our happiness doth lift to thee.
Its eyes in penitence and gratitude!
Thou, chief in station, first to give desert.
Despite its lowliness, its lofty due!
O, thou hast taught a lesson to all greatness
Whether of rank or wealth, that 'tis the roof.
Stately and broad was never meant to house
Equality alone—whose porch is ne'er
So proud, as when it welcomes in desert,
That comes in its own fair simplicity:

THE END.



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